The Green Satin Gown



Laura E Richards

THE GREEN SATIN GOWN



"THE FIRST TITTER PUT A FIRE IN MY VEINS THAT KEPT ME WARM ALL THE EVENING."

THE GREEN SATIN GOWN

By LAURA E. RICHARDS

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TO
THE GIRLS OF
The Friday Club
of Gardiner, Maine
THIS VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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THE GREEN SATIN GOWN

THE GREEN SATIN GOWN

WHO ever wore such a queer-looking thing? I wore it myself, dear, once upon a time; yes, I did! Perhaps you would like to hear about it, while you mend that tear in your muslin. Sit down, then, and let us be cosy.

I was making a visit in Hillton once, when I was seventeen years old, just your age; staying with dear old Miss Persis Elderby, who is now dead. I have told you about her, and it is strange that

I have never told you the story of the green satin gown; but, indeed, it is years since I looked at it. We were great friends, Miss Persis and I; and we never thought much about the difference in our ages, for she was young for her years, and I was old for mine. In our daily walk through the pretty, sleepy Hillton street — we always went for the mail, together, for though Miss Persis seldom received letters, she always liked to see mine, and it was quite the event of the day — my good friend seldom failed to point out to me a stately mansion that stood by itself on a little height, and to say in a tone of pride, "The Le Baron place, my dear; the finest place in the county. Madam Le Baron, who lives there alone now, is as great a lady as any in Europe, though she wears no coronet to her name."

I never knew exactly what Miss Persis meant by this last remark, but it sounded magnificent, and I always gazed respectfully at the gray stone house which sheltered so grand a personage. Madam Le Baron, it appeared, never left the house in winter, and this was January. Her friends called on her at stated intervals, and, to judge from Miss Persis, never failed to come away in a state of reverential enthusiasm. I could not help picturing to myself the great lady as about six feet tall, clad in purple velvet, and waving a peacock-feather fan; but I never confided my imaginings even to the sympathetic Miss Persis.

One day my friend returned from a visit to the stone house, quite breathless, her pretty old face pink with excitement. She sat down on the chair nearest the

door, and gazed at me with speechless emotion.

"Dear Miss Persis!" I cried. "What has happened? Have you had bad news?"

Miss Persis shook her head. "Bad news? I should think not, indeed! Child, Madam Le Baron wishes to see you. More I cannot say at present. Not a word! Put on your best hat, and come with me. Madam Le Baron waits for us!"

It was as if she had said, "The Sultan is on the front door-step." I flew up-stairs, and made myself as smart as I could in such a hurry. My cheeks were as pink as Miss Persis's own, and though I had not the faintest idea what was the matter, I felt that it must be something of vital import. On the way, I begged my companion to explain matters to me, but she only shook her head and trotted on the

faster. "No time!" she panted. "Speech delays me, my dear! All will be explained; only make haste."

We made such haste, that by the time we rang at the door of the stone house neither of us could speak, and Miss Persis could only make a mute gesture to the dignified maid who opened the door, and who looked amazed, as well she might, at our burning cheeks and disordered appearance. Fortunately, she knew Miss Persis well, and lost no time in ushering us into a cool, dimly lighted parlor, hung with family portraits. Here we sat, and fanned ourselves with our pocket-handkerchiefs, while I tried to find breath for a question; but there was not time! A door opened at the further end of the room; there was a soft rustle, a smell of sandalwood in the air. The next moment

Madam Le Baron stood before us. A slender figure, about my own height, in a quaint, old-fashioned dress; snowy hair, arranged in puff on puff, with exquisite nicety; the darkest, softest eyes I ever saw, and a general air of having left her crown in the next room; this was the great lady.

We rose, and I made my best courtesy, — we courtesied then, my dear, instead of bowing like pump-handles, — and she spoke to us in a soft old voice, that rustled like the silk she wore, though it had a clear sound, too. "So this is the child!" she said. "I trust you are very well, my dear! And has Miss Elderby told you of the small particular in which you can oblige me?"

Miss Persis hastened to say that she wasted no time on explanations, but had brought me as quickly as might be, think-

ing that the main thing. Madam Le Baron nodded, and smiled a little; then she turned to me; a few quiet words, and I knew all about it. She had received that morning a note from her grandniece, "a young and giddy person," who lived in B——, some twenty miles away, announcing that she and a party of friends were about to drive over to Hillton to see the old house. She felt sure that her dear aunt would be enchanted to see them, as it must be "quite too forlorn for her, all alone in that great barn;" so she might expect them the next evening (that is, the evening of this very day), in time for supper, and no doubt as hungry as hunters. There would be about a dozen of them, probably, but she knew there was plenty of room at Birchwood, and it would be a good thing to fill up the empty rooms for once in a

way; so, looking forward to a pleasant meeting, the writer remained her dearest aunt's "affectionate niece, Effie Gay."

"The child has no mother," said Madam Le Baron to Miss Persis; then turning to me, she said: "I am alone, save for my two maids, who are of middle age, and not accustomed to youthful visitors. Learning from my good friend, Miss Elderby, that a young gentlewoman was staying at her house, I conceived the idea of asking you to spend the night with me, and such portion of the next day as my guests may remain. If you are willing to do me this service, my dear, you may put off your bonnet, and I will send for your evening dress and your toilet necessaries."

I had been listening in a dream, hearing what was said, but thinking it all like a fairy story, chiefly impressed by the fact

that the speaker was the most beautiful person I had ever seen in my life. The last sentence, however, brought me to my senses with a vengeance. With scarlet cheeks I explained that I had brought no evening dress with me; that I lived a very quiet life at home, and had expected nothing different here; that, to be quite frank, I had not such a thing as an evening dress in the world. Miss Persis turned pale with distress and mortification; but Madam Le Baron looked at me quietly, with her lovely smile.

"I will provide you with a suitable dress, my child," she said. "I have something that will do very well for you. If you like to go to your room now, my maid will attend you, and bring what is necessary. We expect our guests in time for supper, at eight o'clock."

Decidedly, I had walked into a fairy tale, or else I was dreaming! Here I sat in a room hung with flowered damask, in a wonderful chair, by a wonderful fire; and a fairy, little and withered and brown, dressed in what I knew must be black bombazine, though I knew it only from descriptions, was bringing me tea, and plum-cake, on a silver tray. She looked at me with kind, twinkling eyes, and said she would bring the dress at once; then left me to my own wondering fancies. I hardly knew what to be thinking of, so much was happening: more, it seemed, in these few hours, than in all my life before. I tried to fix my mind on the gay party that would soon fill the silent house with life and tumult; I tried to fancy how Miss Effie Gay would look, and what she would say to me; but my

mind kept coming back to the dress, the evening dress, that I was to be privileged to wear. What would it be like? Would silk or muslin be prettier? If only it were not pink! A red-haired girl in pink was a sad sight!

Looking up, I saw a portrait on the wall, of a beautiful girl, in a curious, old-time costume. The soft dark eyes and regal turn of the head told me that it was my hostess in her youth; and even as I looked, I heard the rustle again, and smelt the faint odor of sandalwood; and Madam Le Baron came softly in, followed by the fairy maid, bearing a long parcel.

"Your gown, my dear," she said, "I thought you would like to be preparing for the evening. Undo it, Jessop!"

Jessop lifted fold on fold of tissue-paper. I looked, expecting I know not what fairy

thing of lace and muslin: I saw — the green satin gown!

We were wearing large sleeves then, something like yours at the present day, and high collars; the fashion was at its height. This gown had long, tight, wrinkled sleeves, coming down over the hand, and finished with a ruffle of yellow lace; the neck, rounded and half-low, had a similar ruffle almost deep enough to be called a ruff; the waist, if it could be called a waist, was up under the arms: briefly, a costume of my grandmother's time. Little green satin slippers lay beside it, and a huge feather-fan hung by a green ribbon. Was this a jest? was it — I looked up, with burning cheeks and eyes suffused; I met a glance so kind, so beaming with good-will, that my eyes fell, and I could only

hope that my anguish had not been visible.

"Shall Jessop help you, my dear?" said Madam Le Baron. "You can do it by yourself? Well, I like to see the young independent. I think the gown will become you; it has been considered handsome." She glanced fondly at the shining fabric, and left the room; the maid, after one sharp glance at me, in which I thought I read an amused compassion, followed; and I was left alone with the green satin gown.

Cry? No, I did not cry: I had been brought up not to cry; but I suffered, my dear, as one does suffer at seventeen. I thought of jumping out of the window and running away, back to Miss Persis; I thought of going to bed, and saying I was ill. It was true, I said to myself,

with feverish violence: I *was* ill, sick with shame and mortification and disappointment. Appear before this gay party, dressed like my own great-grandmother? I would rather die! A person might easily die of such distress as this — and so on, and so on!

Suddenly, like a cool touch on my brow, came a thought, a word of my Uncle John's, that had helped me many a time before.

"Endeavor, my dear, to maintain a sense of proportion!"

The words fell with weight on my distracted mind. I sat up straight in the armchair into which I had flung myself, face downward. Was there any proportion in this horror? I shook myself, then put the two sides together, and looked at them. On one side, two lovely old ladies, one of whom I could perhaps help a little,

both of whom I could gratify; on the other, my own — dear me! was it vanity? I thought of the two sweet old faces, shining with kindness; I fancied the distress, the disappointment, that might come into them, if I —

"Yes, dear uncle," I said aloud, "I have found the proportion!" I shook myself again, and began to dress. And now a happy thought struck me. Glancing at the portrait on the wall, I saw that the fair girl was dressed in green. Was it? Yes, it must be — it was — the very same dress! Quickly, and as neatly as I could, I arranged my hair in two great puffs, with a butterfly knot on the top of my head, in the style of the picture; if only I had the high comb! I slipped on the gown, which fitted me well enough. I put on the slippers, and tied the green ribbons round and round

my ankles; then I lighted all the candles, and looked at myself. A perfect guy? Well, perhaps — and yet —

At this moment Jessop entered, bringing a pair of yellow gloves; she looked me over critically, saying nothing; glanced at the portrait, withdrew, and presently reappeared, with the high tortoise-shell comb in her hand. She placed it carefully in my hair, surveyed me again, and again looked at the picture. Yes, it was true, the necklace was wanting; but of course —

Really, Jessop was behaving like a jack-in-the-box! She had disappeared again, and now here she was for the third time; but this time Madam Le Baron was with her. The old lady looked at me silently, at my hair, then up at the picture. The sight of the pleasure in her lovely

face trampled under foot, put out of existence, the last remnant of my foolish pride.

She turned to Jessop and nodded. "Yes, by all means!" she said. The maid put into her hand a long morocco box; Madam kissed me, and with soft, trembling fingers clasped the necklace round my neck. "It is a graceful compliment you pay me, my child," she said, glancing at the picture again, with eyes a little dimmed. "Oblige me by wearing this, to complete the vision of my past youth."

Ten stars of chrysoprase, the purest and tenderest green in the world, set in delicately wrought gold. I need not describe the necklace to you. You think it the most beautiful jewel in the world, and so do I; and I have promised that you

shall wear it on your eighteenth birthday.

Madam Le Baron saw nothing singular in my appearance. She never changed the fashion of her dress, being of the opinion, as she told me afterward, that a gentlewoman's dress is her own affair, not her mantua-maker's; and her gray and silver brocade went very well with the green satin. We stood side by side for a moment, gazing into the long, dim mirror; then she patted my shoulder and gave a little sigh.

"Your auburn hair looks well with the green," she said. "My hair was dark, but otherwise — Shall we go down, my dear?"

I will not say much about the evening. It was painful, of course; but Effie Gay had no mother, and much must be par-

doned in such a case. No doubt I made a quaint figure enough among the six or eight gay girls, all dressed in the latest fashion; but the first moment was the worst, and the first titter put a fire in my veins that kept me warm all the evening. An occasional glance at Madam Le Baron's placid face enabled me to preserve my sense of proportion, and I remembered that two wise men, Solomon and my Uncle John, had compared the laughter of fools to the crackling of thorns under a pot. And — and there were some who did not laugh.

Pin it up, my dear! Your father has come, and will be wanting his tea.

I can tell you the rest of the story in a few words.

A year from that time Madam Le Baron died; and a few weeks after her death, a parcel came for me from Hillton.

Opening it in great wonder, what did I find but the gown, the green satin gown, with the slippers and fan, and the tortoise-shell comb in a leather case! Lifting it reverently from the box, the dress felt singularly heavy on my arm, and a moment's search revealed a strange matter. The pocket was full of gold pieces, shining half-eagles, which fell about me in a golden shower, and made me cry out with amazement; but this was not all! The tears sprang to my eyes as I opened the morocco box and took out the chrysoprase necklace: tears partly of gratitude and pleasure, partly of sheer kindness and love and sorrow for the sweet, stately lady who had thought of me in her closing days, and had found (they told me afterward) one of her last pleasures in planning this surprise for me.

There is something more that I might say, my dear. Your dear father was one of that gay sleighing party; and he often speaks of the first time he saw me — when I was coming down the stairs in the green satin gown.

BLUE EGYPTIANS

BLUE EGYPTIANS[1]

A PAPER-MILL STORY

"I WOULDN'T, Lena!"

"Well, I guess I shall!"

"Don't, Lena! please don't! you will be sorry, I am sure, if you do it. It cannot bring good, I know it cannot!"

"The idea! Mary Denison, you are too old-fashioned for anything. I'd like to know what harm it can do."

The rag-room was nearly deserted. The whistle had blown, and most of the girls had hurried away to their dinner. Two only lingered behind, deep in conversation; Mary Denison and Lena Laxen.

[1] The main incidents in this story are founded on fact.

Mary was sitting by her sorting-table, busily sorting rags as she talked. She was a fair, slender girl, and looked wonderfully fresh and trim in her gray print gown, with a cap of the same material fitting close to her head, and hiding her pretty hair. The other girl was dark and vivacious, with laughing black eyes and a careless mouth. She was picturesque enough in her blue dress, with the scarlet handkerchief tied loosely over her hair; but both kerchief and dress showed the dust plainly, and the dark locks that escaped here and there were dusty too, showing little of the care that may keep one neat even in a rag-room.

"It's just as pretty as it can be!" Lena went on, half-coaxing, half-defiant. "You ought to see it, Mame! A silk waist, every bit as good as new, only of course

it's mussed up, lying in the bag; and a skirt, and lots of other things, all as nice as nice! I can't think what the folks that had them meant, putting such things into the rags: why, that waist hadn't much more than come out of the shop, you might say. And do you think I'm going to let it go through the duster, and then be thrown out, and somebody else get it? No, sir! and it's no good for rags, you know it isn't, Mary Denison."

"I know that it is not yours, Lena, nor mine!" said Mary, steadily. "But I'll tell you what you might do; go straight to Mr. Gordon, and tell him about the pretty waist, — very likely it got in by mistake, — tell him it is no good for rags, and ask if you may have it. Like as not he'll let you have it; and if not, you will

find out what his reason is. I think we ought to suppose he has some reason for what he does."

Lena laughed spitefully.

"Like as not he's going to take it home to his own girl!" she said. "I saw her in the street the other day, and I wouldn't have been seen dead with the hat she had on; not a flower, nor even a scrap of a feather; just a plain band and a goose-quill stuck in it. Real poorhouse, I thought it looked, and he as rich as a Jew. I guess I sha'n't go to Mr. Gordon; he's just as hateful as he can be. He gave out word that no one was to touch that bag, nor so much as go near it; and he had it set off in a corner of the outer shed, close by the chloride barrels, so that everything in it will smell like poison. If that isn't mean, I don't know what is.

"Well, I can't stay here all day, Mame. Aren't you coming?"

"Pretty soon!" said Mary. "Don't wait for me, Lena! I want to finish this stint, so as to have the afternoon off. Mother's poorly to-day, and I want to cook something nice for her supper."

Lena nodded and went out, shutting the door with a defiant swing. Mary looked after her doubtfully, as if hesitating whether she ought not to follow and make some stronger plea; but the next moment she bent over her work again.

"I must hurry!" she said. "I'll see Lena after dinner, and try to make her promise not to touch that bag. I don't see what has got into her."

Mary worked away steadily. The rags were piled in an iron sieve before her; they were mostly the kind called "Blue

Egyptians," cotton cloth dyed with indigo, which had come far across the sea from Egypt. Musty and fusty enough they were, and Mary often turned her head aside as she sorted them carefully, putting the good rags into a huge basket that stood beside her on the floor, while the bits of woollen cloth, of paper and string and other refuse, went into different compartments of the sorting-table, which was something like an old-fashioned box-desk.

Mary was a quick worker, and her basket was already nearly full of rags. Fastened upright beside her seat was a great knife, not unlike a scythe-blade, with which she cut off the buttons and hooks and eyes, running the garment along the keen edge with a quick and practised hand. Usually she amused herself by

imagining stories about the buttons and their former owners, for she was a fanciful girl, and her child-life, without brothers or sisters, had bred in her the habit of solitary play and "make-believe," which clung to her now that she was a tall girl of sixteen. But to-day she was not thinking of the Blue Egyptians. Her thoughts were following Lena on her homeward way, and she was hoping devoutly that her own words might have had some effect, and that Lena might pass by the forbidden bag without lingering to be further tempted. It *was* strange that this one special bundle of rags, coming from a village at some distance, should have been kept apart when the day's allowance was put into the dusters. But — "Mother always says we ought to suppose there is a reason for things!" she said to herself.

And she shook her head resolutely, and tried to make a "button-play."

She pulled from the heap before her a dark blue garment, and turned it over, examining it carefully. It seemed to be a woman's jacket. It was of finer material than most of the "Egyptians," and the fashion was quaint and graceful. There were remnants of embroidery here and there, and the heavy glass buttons were like nothing Mary had ever seen before.

"I'll keep these," she said, "for little Jessie Brown; she will be delighted with them. That child does make so much out of so little, I'm fairly ashamed sometimes. These will be a fortune to Jessie. I'll tell her that I think most likely they belonged to a princess when they were new; they were up and down the front of a dress of gold cloth trimmed with pearls, and she

looked perfectly beautiful when she had it on, and the Prince of the Fortunate Islands fell in love with her."

Buttons were a regular perquisite of the rag-girls in the Cumquot Mill; indeed, any trifle, coin, or seal, or medal, was considered the property of the finder, this being an unwritten law of the rag-room.

Mary cut the buttons off, and slipped them into her pocket; then she ran her fingers round the edge of the jacket, in case there were any hooks or other hard substance that had escaped her notice, and that might blunt the knives of the cutter, into which it would next go.

In a corner of the lining, her fingers met something hard. Here was some object that had slipped down between the stuff and the lining, and must be cut out. Mary ran the jacket along the cutting-

knife, and something rolled into her lap. Not a button this time! she held it up to the light, and examined it curiously. It was a brooch, of glass, or clear stones, in a tarnished silver setting. Dim and dusty, it still seemed full of light, and glanced in the sun as Mary held it up.

"What a pretty thing!" she said. "I wonder if it is glass. I must take this to Mr. Gordon, for I never found anything like it before. Jessie cannot have this."

She laid it carefully aside, and went on with her sorting, working so quickly that in a few moments the sieve was empty, and the basket piled with good cotton rags, ready for the cutting-machine.

Taking her hat and shawl, Mary passed out, holding the brooch carefully in her hand. There were few people in the mill, only the machine-tenders, walking leisurely

up and down beside their machines, which whirred and droned on, regardless of dinner-time. The great rollers went round and round, the broad white streams flowed on and on over the screens, till the mysterious moment came when they ceased to be wet pulp and became paper.

Mary hardly glanced at the wonderful machines; they were an old story to her, though in every throb they were telling over and over the marvellous works of man. The machine-tenders nodded kindly in return to her modest greeting, and looked after her with approval, and said, "Nice gal!" to each other; but Mary hurried on until she came to the finishing-room. Here she hoped to find a friend whom she could consult about her discovery; and, sure enough, old James Gregory was sitting on his accustomed stool,

tying bundles of paper with the perfection that no one else could equal. His back was turned to the door, and he was crooning a fragment of an old paper-mill song, which might have been composed by the beating engine itself, so rhythmic and monotonous it was.

"'Gene, 'Gene,
Made a machine;
Joe, Joe,
Made it go;
Frank, Frank,
Turned the crank,
His mother came out,
And gave him a spank,
And knocked him over
The garden bank."

At Mary's cheerful "Good morning, Mr. Gregory!" the old man turned slowly, and looked at the young girl with friendly eyes.

"Good day, Mary! glad to see ye! goin' along home?"

"In just a minute! I want to show you something, Mr. Gregory, and to ask your advice, please."

The old finisher turned completely round this time, and looked his interest. Mary opened her hand, and displayed the brooch she had found.

James Gregory drew his lips into the form of a whistle, but made no sound. He looked from the brooch to Mary, and back again.

"Well?" he said.

"I found it in the rags; blue Egyptians, you know, Mr. Gregory. It was inside the lining of a jacket. Do you think — what do you think about it? is it glass, or — something else?"

Gregory took the ornament from her, and held it up to the light, screwing his eyes to little points of light; then he

polished it on his sleeve, and held it up again.

"Something else!" he said, briefly.

"Is it — do you think it might be worth something, Mr. Gregory?" asked Mary, rather timidly.

Yes!" roared Gregory, with a sudden explosion. "I do! I b'lieve them's di'monds, sure as here I sit. Mary Denison, you've struck it this time, or I'm a Dutchman."

He got off his stool in great excitement, and walked up and down the room, still holding the brooch in his hand. Mary looked after him, and her face was very pale. She said one word softly, "Mother!" that was all.

Mary Denison and her mother were poor. Mrs. Denison was far from strong, and they had no easy time of it, for there was little



"GREGORY POLISHED IT ON HIS SLEEVE, AND HELD IT UP AGAIN."

save Mary's wages to feed and clothe the two women and pay their rent. James Gregory knew all this; his pale old face was lighted with emotion, and he stumped up and down the room at a rapid pace.

Suddenly he stopped, and faced the anxious girl, who was following him with bewildered eyes.

"Findin's havin'!" he said, abruptly. "That's paper-mill law. Some folks would tell ye to keep this to yourself, and sell it for what you could get."

Mary's face flushed.

"But you do not tell me that!" she said, quietly.

"No!" roared the old man, with another explosion, stamping violently on the floor. "No, I don't. You're poor as spring snakes, and your mother's sickly, and you've hard work to get enough to keep

the flesh on your bones; but I don't tell ye to do that. I tell ye to take it straight to the Old Man, and tell him where ye found it, and all about it. I've knowed him ever since his mustash growed, and before. You go straight to him! He 's in the office now."

"I was going!" said Mary, simply. "I thought I'd come and see you first, Mr. Gregory, you've always been so good to mother and me. You — you couldn't manage to come with me, could you? I am afraid of Mr. Gordon; I can't help it, though he is always pleasant to me."

"I'll go!" said old James, with alacrity. "You come right along with me!"

In his eagerness he seized Mary by the arm, and kept his hold on her as they passed out through the mill. The few "hands" who were at work here and

there gazed after them in amazement; for the old man was dragging the girl along as if he had caught her in some offence, and was going to deliver her up to justice.

The same impression was made in the office, when the pair appeared there. The two clerks stared open-mouthed, and judged after their nature; for one of them said, instantly, to himself, "It's a mistake!" while the other said, "I always knew that Denison girl was too pious to last!"

A tall man who sat at a desk in the corner looked up quietly.

"Ah, Gregory!" he said. "What is it? Mary Denison? Good morning, Mary! Anything wrong in the rag-room?"

Gregory waved his hat excitedly.

"If you'd look here, sir!" he said. "If you would just cast your eye over that article, and tell this gal what you think of

it! Blue Egyptians, sir! luckiest rags that ever come into this mill, I've always said. Well, sir?"

Mr. Gordon was not easily stirred to excitement. It seemed an age to the anxious girl and the impetuous old man, as he turned the brooch over and over, holding it up in every light, polishing it, breathing on it, then polishing it again. Gregory's hands twitched with eagerness, and Mary felt almost faint with suspense.

"You found this in the rags?" he asked at length, turning to Mary. He spoke in his ordinary even tone, and Mary's heart sank, she could not have told why.

"Yes, sir!" she faltered. "I found it in a blue jacket. It was in between the stuff and the lining. There were glass buttons on the jacket."

She drew them from her pocket and

held them out; but Mr. Gordon, after a glance, waved them back.

"Those are of no value!" he said. "About this brooch, I am not so sure. The stones may be real stones — I incline to think they are; but it is possible that they may be paste. The imitations are sometimes very perfect; no one but a jeweller can tell positively. I will take it to Boston with me to-morrow, and have it examined."

He dropped the brooch into a drawer at his side, turned the key and put it in his pocket, all in his quiet, methodical way, as if he were in the habit of examining diamond brooches every day; then he nodded kindly to the pair, and bent over his papers again.

Mary went out silently, and Gregory followed her with a dazed look on his

strong features. He looked back at the door two or three times, but said nothing till they were back in the finishing-room.

Then — "It's one of his days!" he said. "I've knowed him ever since his mustash growed, and there's days when he's struck with a dumb sperit, just like Scriptur'. Don't you fret, Mary! He'll see you righted, or I'll give you my head."

Mary might have thought that Mr. Gregory's head would be of little use to her without the rest of him. She felt sadly dashed and disappointed. She hardly knew what she had expected, but it was something very different from this calm, every-day reception, this total disregard of her own and her companion's excitement.

"I guess he thinks they're nothing great!" she said, wearily. "What was

that he said about paste, Mr. Gregory? You never saw any paste like that, did you?"

"No!" said Gregory, "I've heered of Di'mond Glue, but 'twan't nothin' like stones — nor glass neither. You may run me through the calenders if I know what he's drivin' at. But I'll trust him!" he added, vehemently. "I done right to tell you to go to him. He's in one of his moods to-day, but you'll hear from him, if there's anything to hear, now mark my words! And now I'd go home, if I was you, and see your ma'am, and get your dinner. And — Mary — I dono as I'd say anything about this, if I was you. Things get round so in a mill, ye know."

Mary nodded assurance, and went home, trying to feel that nothing of importance

had happened. Do what she would, however, the golden visions would come dancing before her eyes. Suppose — suppose the stones should be real, after all! and suppose Mr. Gordon should give her a part, at least, of the money they might bring in Boston. It might — she knew diamonds were valuable — it might be thirty or forty dollars. Oh! how rich she would be! The rent could be paid some time in advance, and her mother could have the new shawl she needed so badly: or would a cloak be better? cloaks were more in fashion, but Mother said a good shawl was always good style.

Turning the corner by her mother's house, she met one of the clerks who had been in the office when she went in there. He looked at her with the smile she always disliked, she hardly knew why.

"You did the wrong thing that time, Miss Denison!" he said.

"What do you mean, Mr. Hitchcock?" asked Mary.

"You'll never see your diamonds again, nor the money for them!" replied the man. "That's easy guessing. He'll come back and tell you they're glass or paste, and that's the last you'll hear of them. And the diamonds — for they are diamonds, right enough — will go into his pocket, or on to his wife's neck. I know what's what! I wasn't born down in these parts."

"You don't know Mr. Gordon!" said Mary, warmly. "That isn't the way he is thought of by those who do know him."

The clerk was a newcomer from another State, and was not liked by the mill-workers.

"I know his kind!" he said, with a sneer; "and they're no good to your kind,

Mary Denison, nor to mine. Mark my words, you'll hear no more of that breast-pin."

Mary turned away so decidedly that he said no more, but his eyes followed her with a sinister look.

Next moment he was greeting Lena Laxen cordially, and she was dimpling and smiling all over at his compliments. Lena thought Mr. Hitchcock "just elegant!" and believed that Mary was jealous when she said she did not like him. Something now prompted her to tell him about the silk waist in the forbidden sack; he took her view at once and zealously. The boss (for he did not use the kindly title of "Old Man," by which the other mill-hands designated Mr. Gordon, though he was barely forty) had his eye on the things, most likely, as he had on the pin Mary Denison

found. Hadn't Lena heard about that? Well, it was a burning shame, he could tell her; he would see that she, Lena, wasn't fooled that way. And Lena, listening eagerly, heard a story very different from that which had been told to Mr. Gordon.

In an hour the whole mill knew that Mary Denison had found a diamond pin in the rags, and that Mr. Gordon had told her it was nothing but hard glue, and had sold it himself in Boston for a thousand dollars, and spent the money on a new horse.

Nor was this all! Late that evening Lena Laxen stole from her home with a shawl over her head, and met the clerk by the corner of the outer shed. A few minutes of whispering and giggling, and she stole back, with a bundle under her

shawl; while Hitchcock tied a bright silk handkerchief round his neck, and strutted off with the air of a conqueror.

Next morning, as Mary Denison was going to her work, Lena rapped on the window, and called her attention by signs to the bodice she had on. It was a gay striped silk, little worn, but still showing, in spite of pressing, the marks of crumpling and tossing. The bright colors suited Lena's dark skin well, and as she stood there with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, Mary thought she had never seen her look prettier. At first she nodded and smiled in approval; but the next moment a thought darted into her mind that made her clasp her hands, and cry anxiously:

"Oh! Lena, you didn't do it! you never did it! it's not *that* waist you have on?"

Lena affected not to hear. She only

nodded and laughed triumphantly, and turned away, leaving Mary standing pale and distressed outside the window.

Mary hesitated. Should she go in and reason further with the wilful girl, and try to persuade her to restore the stolen garment? Something told her it would be useless; but still she was on the point of going in, when old James Gregory came by, and asked her to walk on with him.

She complied, but not without an anxious look back at the window, where no one was now to be seen.

"Well, May," said Gregory, "how're ye feelin' to-day? hearty? that's clever! I hope you wasn't frettin' about that pin any. Most girls would, but you ain't the fool kind."

"I don't know, Mr. Gregory!" said Mary, laughing. "I'm afraid I have

thought about it more or less, but I haven't been fretting. Where's the use?"

"Jes' so! jes' so!" assented the old man, with alacrity.

"And I didn't say anything to Mother," Mary went on. "I didn't want her to know about it unless something was really coming of it. Poor Mother! she has enough to think about."

"She has so!" said Gregory. "A sight o' thinkin' your mother doos, Mary, and good thoughts, every one of 'em, I'll bet my next pay. She's a good woman, your mother; I guess likely you know it without me sayin' so. I call Susan Denison the best woman I know, and I've told my wife so, more times than she says she has any occasion for. I don't say she's an angel, but she's a good woman, and that's as fur as we're likely to get in this world.

"But that ain't what I wanted to say to you, May! Somehow or 'nother, the story's got round about your findin' that pin yesterday. You didn't say nothin'?"

"Not a word!" said Mary. "How could it —"

"'Twas that pison Hitchcock, I expect!" said Gregory. "I see him lookin' up with his little eyes, as red as a ferret, and as ugly. I bet he started the hull thing; and he's tacked on a passel of lies, and the endurin' place is hummin' with it. Thought I'd tell ye before ye went in, so's ye could fix up a little what to say."

Mary thanked him cordially, and passed on into the mill: the old man looked after her with a very friendly glance in his keen blue eyes.

"She's good stuff, May is!" he murmured. "Good stuff, like her mother.

Folks is like rags, however you look at 'em. Take a good linen rag, no matter how black it is, and put it through the washers, and the bleachers, and the cutters, and all the time it's gettin' whiter and whiter, and sweeter and sweeter, the more you bang it round; till at last you have bank-note paper, and write to the Queen of England on it, if you're a mind to, and she won't have none better. And take jute or shoddy, and the minute you touch to wash it, it cockles up, or drops to pieces, and it ain't no good to mortal man. Jest like folks, I tell ye! and May and her mother's pure linen clippin's, if ever I see 'em."

Forewarned is forearmed, and Mary met quietly the buzz of inquiry that greeted her when she entered the rag-room. The girls crowded round her, the men were not far behind. To each and all Mary told the

simple truth, trying not to say a word too much. "The tongue is a fire!" her mother's favorite text, was constantly in her mind, and she was determined that no ill word should be spoken of Mr. Gordon, if she could help it. Almost every one in the mill liked and respected the "Old Man;" but the human mind loves a sensation, and Lena and Hitchcock had told their story so vividly the day before that Mary's account seemed tame and dull beside it; and some of the hands preferred to think that "Mame Denison was a sly one, and warn't goin' to let on, fear some one'd git ahead of her."

Lena, who came shortly, in her usual dress, fostered this feeling, not from malice, but from sheer love of excitement and gossip. In spite of Mary's efforts, the excitement increased, and when, late in the

afternoon, word came that Mary Denison was wanted in the office, the rag-room was left fairly bubbling with wild surmise.

Mr. Gordon did not see Mary when she came in. He was standing at his desk, with an open letter in his hand, and his face was disturbed as he spoke to the senior clerk.

"Myers, it is as I feared about that bag of rags from Blankton. You have kept it carefully tied up, and close by the chlorides, as I told you?"

Myers, a clear-eyed, honest-browed man, looked troubled.

"I did, sir!" he said. "I have looked at the bag every time I passed that way, and have cautioned every one in the mill not to go near it, besides keeping the shed-gate locked; but this morning I found that it had been tampered with, and evidently

something taken out. I hope there is nothing wrong, sir!"

George Gordon struck his hand heavily on the desk. "Wrong!" he repeated. "There have been two fatal cases of smallpox in Blankton, and that bag has been traced to the house where they were."

There was a moment of deathly silence. He went on:

"I suspected something wrong, the moment you told me of things that looked new and good; but I did not want to raise a panic in the mill, when there might be some other explanation. I thought I had taken every precaution — what is that?"

He turned quickly, hearing a low cry behind him. Mary Denison was standing with clasped hands, her face white with terror.

"Mary!" said Mr. Gordon, in amaze-

ment. "You — surely you have had nothing to do with this?"

"No, sir!" cried Mary. "Oh, no, Mr. Gordon, indeed I have not. But I fear — I fear I know who has. Oh, poor thing! poor Lena!"

Then, with an impulse she could not explain, she turned suddenly upon Hitchcock.

"Who let Lena Laxen into the yard last night?" she cried. "She could not have got in without help. You had a key — you were talking to her after I left her yesterday. Oh! look at him, Mr. Gordon! Mr. Myers, look at that man!"

But Hitchcock did not seem to hear or heed her. He sat crouched over his desk, his face a greenish-gray color, his eyes staring, his hands clutching the woodwork convulsively; an awful figure of terror, that gasped and cowered before them. Then

suddenly, with a cry that rattled in his throat, he dashed from his seat and ran bareheaded out of the door.

Myers started up to pursue him, but Mr. Gordon held up his hand.

"Let him go!" he said, sternly. "It may be that he carries his punishment with him. In any case we shall see him no more."

Quickly and quietly he gave Myers his orders; to take Lena Laxen to her home, notify the physician, and proclaim a strict quarantine; to burn the infected rags without loss of time; to have every part of the shed where the fatal bag had stood thoroughly disinfected. When the man had hastened away, Mr. Gordon turned to Mary, and his stern face lightened.

"Do not distress yourself, Mary," he said, kindly. "It may be that Lena will escape the infection; it seems that she

only had the garment on a few minutes; and you did all you could, I am sure, to dissuade her from this piece of fatal and dishonest folly."

"Oh! I might have said more!" cried Mary, in an agony of self-reproach. "I meant to go into her house this morning, and try to make her hear reason; it might not have been too late then."

"Thank Heaven you did not!" said Mr. Gordon, gravely. "The air of the house was probably already infected. No one save the doctor must go near that house till all danger of the disease developing is over."

He then told Mary briefly why he had sent for her. Finding that he could not go to Boston himself at present, as he had planned, he had sent the brooch by express to a jeweller whom he knew, and would be

able to tell her in a few days whether it was of real value or not. Mary thanked him, but his words fell almost unheeded on her ears. What were jewels or money, in the face of a danger so awful as that which now threatened her friend, and, through her, the whole village?

Days of suspense followed. From the moment when the weeping, agonized Lena was taken home and put, tenderly, pityingly, in her mother's hands (it was Mr. Gordon himself who had done this, refusing to let any other perform the duty), an invisible line was drawn about the Laxen cottage, which few dared pass. The doctor came and went, reporting all well to the eager questioners. Mr. Gordon called daily to inquire, and every evening Mary Denison stole to the door with a paper or magazine for Lena and her mother, or some

home-made delicacy that might please the imprisoned girl. Lena was usually at the window, sometimes defiant and blustering, sometimes wild with fright, sometimes again crying for sheer loneliness and vexation; but always behind her was her mother's pale face of dread, and her thin voice saying that Lena was "as well as common, thank ye," and she and Mary would exchange glances, and Mary would go away drawing breath, and thanking the Lord that another day was gone.

So on, for nine anxious days; but on the tenth, when Mary looked up at the window, the mother stood there alone, crying; and the doctor, coming out of the house at the moment, told Mary harshly to keep away from him, and not to come so near the house.

In the dreadful days that followed, his

people learned to know George Gordon as they had never known him before. The grave, silent man, who never spoke save when speech was necessary, was now among them every day, going from room to room with cheerful greetings, encouraging, heartening, raising the drooping spirits, and rebuking sharply the croakers, who foretold with dismal unction a general epidemic. While taking every possible precaution, he made light of the actual danger, and by his presence and influence warded off the panic which might have brought about the dreaded result.

As a matter of fact, there were no more cases in the mill; and Lena herself had the terrible disease more lightly than any one had dared to hope. The doctor, hurrying through back ways and alleys to change his clothes and take his bath of disinfect-

ants, was hailed from back gates and windows at every step; and he never failed to return a cheery "Doing well! out of it soon now! No, not much marked, only a few spots here and there."

This was when he left the quarantined house; but when he sought it, he might be seen to stop at one gate and another, picking up here a jar, there a bowl, here again a paper bag; till by the time he reached the Laxen gate he stood out all over with packages like a summer Santa Claus.

"There ain't anybody goin' to starve round here, if they *have* got the smallpox!" was the general verdict, voiced by James Gregory, and when he added, for the benefit of the mill-yard, that he had heard Mr. Gordon order ice-cream, oranges, and oysters, all at once, for Lena, a growl of pleasure went round, which deepened into

a hearty "What's the matter with the Old Man? *he's* all right!"

At length, one happy day, Mary Denison met Mr. Gordon at the Laxens' gate, and heard the good news that Lena was sitting up; that in a day or two now the quarantine would be taken off, the house disinfected, and Lena back in her place at the mill. The manager looked with satisfaction at Mary's beaming face of happiness; then, as she was turning away to spread the good tidings, he said:

"Wait a moment, Mary! I have some other news for you. Have you forgotten the brooch that you found in the Blue Egyptians?"

The color rushed to Mary's face, and Mr. Gordon had his answer.

"Because," he added, "I have not forgotten, though you might well think I had

done so. All this sad business has delayed matters, but now I have it all arranged. I am ready to-day, Mary, to give you either the brooch itself, or — what I think will be better — five hundred dollars, the sum I find it to be worth. Yes, my child, I am speaking the truth! The stones are fine ones, and the Boston jeweller offers you that sum for them. Well, Mary, have you nothing to say? What, crying? this will never do!"

But Mary had nothing to say, and she was crying, because she could not help it. Presently she managed to murmur something about "Too much! too great kindness — not fair for her to have it all!" but Mr. Gordon cut her short.

"Certainly you are to have it all, every penny of it! Finding's having! that is paper-mill law; ask James Gregory if it

is not! There comes James this moment; go and tell him of your good fortune, and let him bring you up to my house this evening to get the money.

"But, Mary," — he glanced at a letter in his hand, and his face, which had been bright with kindness and pleasure, grew very grave, —"there is something else for you to tell James, and all the hands. James Hitchcock died yesterday, of malignant smallpox!"

LITTLE BENJAMIN

LITTLE BENJAMIN

"Then is little Benjamin their ruler."

"I THINK the kitty wants to come in," said Mother Golden. "I hear him crying somewhere. Won't you go and let him in, Adam?"

Adam laid down his book and went out; the whole family looked up cheerfully, expecting to see Aladdin, the great Maltese cat, enter with his stately port. There was a pause; then Adam came back with a white, scared face, and looked at his father without speaking.

"What is the matter, my son?" asked Father Golden.

"Is Kitty hurt?" asked Mother Golden, anxiously.

"Was it that dog of Jackson's?" cried Lemuel, Mary, Ruth, and Joseph.

"The cat isn't there!" said Adam. "It's — it's a basket, father."

"A basket? What does the boy mean?"

"A long basket, with something white inside; and — it's crying!"

The boy had left the door open, and at this moment a sound came through it, a long, low, plaintive cry.

"My heart!" said Mother Golden; and she was out of the door in a flash.

"See there now!" said Father Golden, reprovingly. "Your mother's smarter than any of you to-day. Go and help her, some of you!"

The children tumbled headlong toward the door, but were met by Mother Golden



"'A LONG BASKET WITH SOMETHING WHITE INSIDE;
AND — IT'S CRYING!'"

returning, bearing in her strong arms a long basket, in which was indeed something white and fluffy that cried.

"A baby!" exclaimed Father Golden.

"A baby!" echoed Mary, Lemuel, Ruth, and Joseph.

"Well, I knew it was a baby," protested Adam; "but I didn't like to say so."

Mother Golden lifted the child out and held it in a certain way; the cries ceased, and the little creature nestled close against her and looked up in her face.

"My heart!" said Mother Golden again. "Come here, girls!"

The girls pressed forward eagerly; the boys hung back, and glanced at their father; these were women's matters.

"It's got hair!" cried Ruth, in rapture. "Mother! real hair, and it curls; see it curl!"

"Look at its little hands!" murmured Mary. "They're like pink shells, only soft. Oh! see it move them, Ruth!" She caught her sister's arm in a sudden movement of delight.

"Oh, mother, mayn't we keep it?" cried both girls at once.

Mother Golden was examining the baby's clothes.

"Cambric slip, fine enough, but not so terrible fine. Flannel blanket, machine-embroidered — stop! here's a note."

She opened a folded paper, and read a few words, written in a carefully rough hand.

"His mother is dead, his father a waif. Ask the woman with the kind eyes to take care of him, for Christ's sake."

"My heart!" said Mother Golden, again.

"It's a boy, then!" said Father Golden,

brightening perceptibly. He came forward, the boys edging forward too, encouraged by another masculine presence.

"It's a boy, and a beauty!" said Mother Golden, wiping her eyes. "I never see a prettier child. Poor mother, to have to go and leave him. Father, what do you say?"

"It's for you to say, mother;" said Father Golden. "It's to you the child was sent."

"Do you suppose 'twas me that was meant? They might have mistaken the house."

"Don't talk foolishness!" said Father Golden. "The question is, what shall we do with it? There's places, a plenty, where foundlings have the best of bringing up; and you've got care enough, as it is, mother, without taking on any more."

"Oh! we could help!" cried Mary. "I could wash and dress it, I know I could, and I'd just love to."

"So could I!" said twelve-year-old Ruth. "We'd take turns, Mary and I. Do let's keep it, mother!"

"It's a great responsibility!" said Father Golden.

"Great Jemima!" said Mother Golden, with a sniff. "If I couldn't take the responsibility of a baby, I'd give up."

Father Golden's mind moved slowly, and while he was meditating a reply, his wife issued various commands, and went through some intricate feminine manœuvres, with the effect of increased fluffiness on the baby's part. In five minutes she was feeding the child with warm milk from a spoon, and proclaiming that he ate "like a Major!"

The boys, gaining more and more confidence, were now close at her knee, and watched the process with eager eyes.

"He's swallering like anything!" cried Lemuel. "I can see him do it with his throat, same as anybody."

"See him grab the spoon!" said Joseph. "My! ain't he strong? Can he talk, mother?"

"Joe, you chuckle-head!" said Adam, who was sixteen, and knew most things. "How can he talk, when he hasn't got any teeth?"

"Uncle 'Rastus hasn't got any teeth," retorted Joseph, "and he talks like a buzz-saw."

"Hush, Joseph!" said Mother Golden, reprovingly. "Your Uncle 'Rastus is a man of years."

"Yes, mother!" said Joseph, meekly.

"Baby *has* got a tooth, too, Adam!" Mother Golden continued, triumphantly. "I feel it pricking through the gum this minute. And he so good, and laughing like a sunflower! Did it hurt him, then, a little precious man? he shall have a nice ring to-morrow day, to bitey on, so he shall!"

"I suppose, then, he must be as much as a week old," hazarded Adam, in an off-hand tone. "They are never born with teeth, are they, unless they are going to be Richard the Thirds, or something wonderful?"

"Perhaps he is!" said Ruth. "He looks wonderful enough for Richard the Twentieth, or anything."

But — "A week old!" said Mother Golden. "It's time there was a baby in this house, if you don't know better than

that, Adam. About six months old I call him, and as pretty a child as ever I saw, even my own."

She looked half-defiantly at Father Golden, who returned the look with one of mild deprecation.

"I was only thinking of the care 'twould be to you, mother," he said. "We're bound to make inquiries, and report the case, and so forth; but if nothing comes of that, we might keep the child for a spell, and see how things turn out."

"That's what I was thinking!" said Mother Golden, eagerly. "I was thinking anyway, Joel, 'twould be best to keep him through his teething and stomach troubles, and give him a good start in the way of proper food and nursing. At them homes and nurseries, they mean well, but the most of them's young, and they *don't*

understand a child's stomach. It's experience they need, not good-will, I'm well aware. Of course, when Baby begun to be a boy, things might be different. You work hard enough as it is, father, and there's places, no doubt, could do better for him, maybe, than what we could. But — well, seeing whose name he come in, I *do* feel to see him through his teething."

"Children, what do you say?" asked Father Golden. "You're old enough to have your opinion, even the youngest of you."

"Oh, keep him! keep him!" clamored the three younger children.

Adam and Lemuel exchanged a glance of grave inquiry.

"I guess he'd better stay, father!" said Adam.

"I think so, too!" said Lemuel; and both gave something like a sigh of relief.

"Then that's settled," said Father Golden, "saying and supposing that no objection turns up. Next thing is, what shall we call this child?"

All eyes were fixed on the baby, who, now full of warm milk, sat throned on Mother Golden's knee, blinking content.

It was a pretty picture: the rosy, dimpled creature, the yellow floss ruffled all over his head, his absurd little mouth open in a beaming smile; beaming above him, Mother Golden's placid face in its frame of silver hair; fronting them, Father Golden in his big leather chair, solid, comfortable, benevolent; and the five children, their honest, sober faces lighted up with unusual excitement. A pleasant, homelike picture. Nothing remarkable in the way

of setting; the room, with its stuffed chairs, its tidies, and cabinet organ, was only unlike other such rooms from the fact that Mother Golden habitually sat in it; she could keep even haircloth from being commonplace. But now, all the light in the room seemed to centre on the yellow flossy curls against her breast.

"A-goo!" said the baby, in a winning gurgle.

"He says his name's Goo!" announced Joseph.

"Don't be a chuckle-head, Joe!" said Adam. "What was the name on the paper, mother?"

"It said 'his father is a Waif;' but I don't take that to be a Christian name. Surname, more likely, shouldn't you say, father?"

"Not a Christian name, certainly," said

Father Golden. "Not much of a name anyhow, 'pears to me. We'd better give the child a suitable name, mother, saying and supposing no objection turns up. Coming into a Christian family, let him have Christian baptism, I say."

"Oh, call him Arthur!"

"Bill!"

"Richard!"

"Charlie!"

"Reginald!" cried the children in chorus.

"I do love a Bible name!" said Mother Golden, pensively. "It gives a child a good start, so to say, and makes him think when he hears himself named, or ought so to do. All our own children has Bible names, father; don't let us cut the little stranger off from his privilege."

"But Bible names are so ugly!" ob-

jected Lemuel, who was sensitive, and suffered under his own cognomen.

"Son," said Father Golden, "your mother chooses the names in this family."

"Yes, father!" said Lemuel.

"Lemuel, dear, you was named for a king!" said Mother Golden. "He was a good boy to his mother, and so are you. Bring the Bible, and let us see what it opens at. Joseph, you are the youngest, you shall open it."

Joseph opened the great brown leather Bible, and closing his eyes, laid his hand on the page; then looking down, he read:

"'There is little Benjamin their ruler, and the princes of Judah their council: the princes of Zebulun and the princes of Nephtali.'"

"Zebulun and Nephtali are outlandish-sounding names," said Mother Golden.

"I never knew but one Nephtali, and he squinted. Benjamin shall be this child's name. Little Benjamin: the Lord bless and keep him!"

"Amen!" said Father Golden.

PART II.

"Father, may I come in, if you are not busy?"

It was Mary who spoke; Mary, the dear eldest daughter, now a woman grown, grave and mild, trying hard to fill the place left empty these two years, since Mother Golden went smiling out of life.

Father Golden looked up from his book; he was an old man now, but his eyes were still young and kind.

"What is it, daughter Mary?"

"The same old story, father dear; Benny in mischief again. This time he has rubbed

soot on all the door-handles, and the whole house is black with it. I hate to trouble you, father, but I expect you'll have to speak to him. I do love the child so, I'm not strict enough — I'm ashamed to say it, but they all think so, and I know it's true — and Adam is too strict."

"Yes, Adam is too strict," said Father Golden. He looked at a portrait that stood on his desk, a framed photograph of Mother Golden.

"I'll speak to the child, Mary," he said. "I'll see that this does not happen again. What is it, Ruthie?"

"I was looking for Mary, father. I wanted — oh, Mary! what shall I do with Benny? he has tied Rover and the cat together by their tails, and they are rushing all about the garden almost crazy. I must finish this work, so I can't attend to

it. He says he is playing Samson. I wish you would speak to him, father."

"I will do so, Ruth, I will do so. Don't be distressed, my daughter."

"But he is so naughty, father! he is so different from the other boys. Joe never used to play such tricks when he was little."

"The spring vacation will be over soon now, Ruth," said Sister Mary. "He is always better when he is at work, and there is so little for a boy to do just at this time of year."

"I left Joe trying to catch the poor creatures," said Ruth. "Here he comes now."

Joe, a tall lad of seventeen, entered with a face of tragedy.

"Any harm done, Joseph?" asked Father Golden, glancing at the portrait on his desk.

"It's that kid again, father!" said Joe. "Poor old Rover—"

"Father knows about that, Joe!" said Mary, gently.

"Did you get them apart?" cried Ruth.

"Yes, I did, but not till they had smashed most of the glass in the kitchen windows, and trampled all over Mary's geraniums. Something has got to be done about that youngster, father. He's getting to be a perfect nuisance."

"I am thinking of doing something about him, son Joseph," said Father Golden. "Are your brothers in the house?"

"I think I heard them come in just now, sir. Do you want to see them?"

Apparently Adam and Lemuel wanted to see their father, for they appeared in the doorway at this moment: quiet-looking

men, with grave, "set" faces; the hair already beginning to edge away from their temples.

"You are back early from the office, boys!" said Father Golden.

"We came as soon as we got the message," said Adam. "I hope nothing is wrong, father."

"What message, Adam?"

"Didn't you send for us? Benny came running in, all out of breath, and said you wished to see us at once. If he has been playing tricks again —"

Adam's grave face darkened into sternness. The trick was too evident.

"Something must be done about that boy, father!" he said. "He is the torment of the whole family."

"No one can live a day in peace!" said Lemuel.

"No dumb creature's life is safe!" said Joe.

"He breaks everything he lays hands on," said Ruth, "and he won't keep his hands off anything."

"You were all little once, boys!" said Mary.

"We never behaved in this kind of way!" said the brothers, sedate from their cradles. "Something must be done!"

"You are right," said Father Golden. "Something must be done."

Glancing once more at the portrait of Mother Golden, he turned and faced his children with grave looks.

"Sit down, sons and daughters!" said the old man. "I have something to say to you."

The young people obeyed, wondering,

but not questioning. Father Golden was head of the house.

"You all come to me," said Father Golden, "with complaints of little Benjamin. It is singular that you should come to-day, for I have been waiting for this day to speak to you about the child myself."

He paused for a moment; then added, weighing his words slowly, as was his wont when much in earnest, "Ten years ago to-day, that child was left on our door-step."

The brothers and sisters uttered an exclamation, half surprised, half acquiescent.

"It doesn't seem so long!" said Adam.

"It seems longer!" said Mary.

"I keep forgetting he came that way!" murmured Joe.

"I felt doubtful about taking him in," Father Golden went on. "But your mother

wished it; you all wished it. We decided to keep him for a spell, and give him a good start in life, and we have kept him till now."

"Of course we have kept him!" said Ruth.

"Naturally!" said Lemuel.

Adam and Mary said nothing, but looked earnestly at their father.

"Little Benjamin is now ten years old, more or less," said Father Golden. "You are men and women grown; even Joseph is seventeen. Your mother has entered into the rest that is reserved for the people of God, and I am looking forward in the hope that, not through any merit of mine, but the merciful grace of God, I may soon be called to join her. Adam and Lemuel, you are settled in the business, and looking forward to making homes of your own

with worthy young women. Joseph is going to college, which is a new thing in our family, but one I approve, seeing his faculty appears to lie that way. Ruth will make a first-rate dressmaker, I am told by those who know. Mary—"

His quiet voice faltered. Mary took his hand and kissed it passionately; a sob broke from her, and she turned her face away from the brothers and sister who loved but did not understand her. They looked at her with grave compassion, but no one would have thought of interrupting Father Golden.

"Mary, you are the home-maker," the old man went on. "I hope that when I am gone this home will still be here, with you at the head of it. You are your mother's own daughter; there is no more to say."

He was silent for a time, and then continued.

"There remains little Benjamin, a child of ten years. He is no kin to us; an orphan, or as good as one; no person has ever claimed him, or ever will. The time has come to decide what shall be done with the child."

Again he paused, and looked around. The serious young faces were all intent upon him; in some, the intentness seemed deepening into trouble, but no one spoke or moved.

"We have done all that we undertook to do for him, that night we took him in, and more. We have brought him — I should say your mother brought him — through his sickly days; we 'most lost him, you remember, when he was two years old, with the croup — and he is now

a healthy, hearty child, and will likely make a strong man. He has been well treated, well fed and clothed, maybe better than he would have been by his own parents if so't had been. He is turning out wild and mischievous, though he has a good heart, none better; and you all, except Mary, come to me with complaints of him.

"Now, this thing has gone far enough. One of two things: either this boy is to be sent away to some institution, to take his place among other orphans and foundlings, or — he must be one of you for now and always, to share alike with you while I live, to be bore with and helped by each and every one of you as if he was your own blood, and to have his share of the property when I am gone. Sons and daughters, this question is for you to decide.

I shall say nothing. My life is 'most over, yours is just beginning. I have no great amount to leave you, but 'twill be comfortable so far as it goes. Benjamin has one-sixth of that, and becomes my own son, to be received and treated by you as your own brother, or he goes."

Mary hid her face in her hands. Adam walked to the window and looked out; but the other three broke out into a sudden, hurried clamor, strangely at variance with their usual staid demeanor.

"Oh, father, we couldn't let him go!"

"Why, father, I can't think what you mean!"

"I'm sure, sir, we never thought of such a thing as sending him away. Why, he's our Ben."

"Good enough little kid, only mischievous."

"Needs a little governing, that's all. Mary spoils him; no harm in him, not a mite."

"And the lovingest little soul! the minute he found that Kitty's paw was cut, he sat down and cried — "

"I guess if Benny went, I'd go after him pretty quick!" said Joseph, who had been loudest in his complaint against the child.

Mary looked up and smiled through her tears. "Joe, your heart is in the right place!" she said. "I finished your shirts this morning, dear; I'm going to begin on your slippers to-night."

"Well, but, father — "

"Father dear, about little Benny — "

"Yes, sir — poor little Ben!"

"Go easy!" said Father Golden; and his face, as he looked from one to the other, was as bright as his name.

"Why, children, you're real excited. I don't want excitement, nor crying — Mary, daughter, I knew how you would feel, anyway. I want a serious word, 'go,' or 'stay,' from each one of you; a word that will last your lives long. I'll begin with the youngest, because that was your mother's way. She always said the youngest was nearest heaven. Joseph, what is your word about little Benjamin?"

"Stay, of course!" cried Joe. "Benny does tease me, but I should be nowhere without him."

"Ruth! you seemed greatly tried just now. Think what you are going to say."

"Oh, of course he must stay, father. Why, the child is the life of the house. We are all so humdrum and mopy, I don't know what we should do without Benny to keep us moving."

"Mary, daughter — not that I need your answer, my dear."

"He is the only child I shall ever have!" said Mary, simply.

There was silence for a moment, and all thought of the grave where her young heart had laid its treasure.

"Lemuel!"

"I've been hard on the child, Father!" said Lemuel. "He's so different from the rest of us, and he does try me. But mother loved him, and down at the bottom we all do, I guess. I say 'stay,' too, and I'll try to be more of a brother to him from now on."

"Son Adam, I have left you the longest time to reflect," said Father Golden. "You are the oldest, and when I am gone it will be on you and Mary that the heft of the care will come. Take all the

time you want, and then give us your word!"

Adam turned round; his face was very grave, but he spoke cheerfully.

"I have had time enough, Father," he said. "I was the first that heard that little voice, ten years ago, and the first, except mother, that saw the child; 'twould be strange if I were the one to send him away. He came in Christ's name, and in that name I bid him stay."

"Amen!" said Father Golden.

A silence followed; but it was broken soon by a lively whistle, shrilling out a rollicking tune; the next moment a boy came running into the room. Curly, rosy, dirty, ragged, laughing, panting, little Benjamin stood still and looked round on all the earnest, serious faces.

"What's the matter, all you folks?" he

asked. "I should think you was all in meeting, and sermon just beginning. Ruth, I tied up Kitty's leg all right; and I'll dig greens to pay for the glass, Joe. Say, Bro'rer-Adam-an'-Lem (Benny pronounced this as if it were one word), did you forget it was April Fool's Day? Didn't I fool you good? And — say! there's a fierce breeze and my new kite's a buster. Who'll come out and fly her with me?"

"I will, Benny!" said Adam, Lemuel, Mary, Ruth, and Joseph.

DON ALONZO

DON ALONZO

"Don Alonzo! Don Alonzo Pitkin! Where be you?"

There was no answer.

"Don Alonzo! Deacon Bassett's here, and wishful to see you. Don Alonzo Pit-*kin!*"

Mrs. Joe Pitkin stood at the door a moment, waiting; then she shook her shoulders with a despairing gesture, and went back into the sitting-room. "I don't know where he is, Deacon Bassett," she said. "There! I'm sorry; but he's so bashful, Don Alonzo is, he'll creep off and hide anywheres sooner than see folks. I do feel mortified, but I can't seem to help it, no way in the world."

"No need to, Mis' Pitkin," said Deacon Bassett, rising slowly and reaching for his hat. "No need to. I should have been pleased to see Don 'Lonzo, and ask if he got benefit from those pills I left for him last time I called; what he wants is to doctor reg'lar, and keep straight on doctorin'. But I can call again; and I felt it a duty to let you know what's goin' on at your own yard-gate, I may say. Mis' Pegrum's house ain't but a stone's throw from yourn, is it? Well, I'll be wishing you good day, and I hope Joseph will be home before there's any trouble. I don't suppose you've noticed whether Don Alonzo has growed any, sence he took those pills?"

"No, I haven't!" said Mrs. Pitkin, shortly. "Good day, Deacon Bassett."

"Yes, you can call again," she added, mentally, as she watched the deacon mak-

ing his way slowly down the garden walk, stopping the while to inspect every plant that looked promising. "You can call again, but you will not see him, if you come every day. It does beat all, the way folks can't let that boy alone. Talk about his being cranky! I'd be ten times as cranky as he is, if I was pestered by every old podogger that's got stuff to sell."

She closed the door, and addressed the house, apparently empty and still. "He's gone!" she said, speaking rather loudly, "Don 'Lonzo, he's gone, and you can come out. I expect you're hid somewheres about here, for I didn't hear you go out."

There was no sound. She opened the door of the ground-floor bedroom and looked in. All was tidy and pleasant as usual. Every mat lay in its place; the chairs were set against the wall as she

loved to see them; the rows of books, the shelves of chemicals, at which she hardly dared to look, and which she never dared to touch for fear something would "go off" and kill her instantly, the specimens in their tall glass jars, the case of butterflies, all were in their place; but there was no sign of life in the room, save the canary in the window.

"Deacon Bassett's gone!" she said, speaking to the canary.

There was a scuffling sound from under the bed; the valance was lifted, and a head emerged cautiously.

"I tell you he's gone!" repeated Mira Pitkin, rather impatiently. "Come out, Don Alonzo! There! you are foolish, I must say!"

The head came out, followed by a figure. The figure was that of a boy of twelve, but

the head belonged to a youth of seventeen. The rounded shoulders, the sharp features, the dark, sunken eyes, all told a tale of suffering; Don Alonzo Pitkin was a hunchback.

His pretty, silly mother had given him the foolish name which seemed a perpetual mockery of his feeble person. She had found it in an old romance, and had only wavered between it and Señor Gonzalez, — which she pronounced Seener Gon-zallies, — the other dark-eyed hero of the book. Perhaps she pictured to herself her baby growing up into such another lofty, black-plumed hidalgo as those whose magnificent language and mustachios had so deeply impressed her. It was true that she herself had pinkish eyes and white eyelashes, while her husband was familiarly known as "Carrots," — but what of that?

But he had a fall, this poor baby, — a cruel fall, from the consequences of which no high-sounding name could save him; and then presently the little mother died, and the father married again.

The boy's childhood had been a sad one, and all the happiness he had known had been lately, since his elder brother married. Big, good-natured Joe Pitkin, marrying the prettiest girl in the village, had been sore at heart, even in his new-wedded happiness, at the thought of leaving the deformed, sensitive boy alone with the careless father and the shrewish stepmother. But his young wife had been the first to say:

"Let Don Alonzo come and live with us, Joe! Where there is room for two, there is room for three, and that boy wants to be made of!"

So the strong, cheerful, wholesome young woman took the sickly lad into her house and heart, and "made of him," to use her own quaint phrase; and she became mother and sister and sweetheart, all in one, to Don Alonzo.

Now she stood looking at him, shaking her head, yet smiling. "Don 'Lonzo, how can you behave so?" she asked. "This is the third time Deacon Bassett has been here to see you, and he's coming again; and what be I to say to him next time he comes? You can't go through life without seeing folks, you know."

Don Alonzo shook his shoulders, and pretended to look for dust on his coat. He would have been deeply mortified to find any, for he took care of his own room, and prided himself, with reason, on its neatness. Also, the space beneath his

bedstead was cupboard as well as hiding-place.

"He troubles me," he said, meekly. "Deacon Bassett troubles me more than any of 'em. Did he ask if I'd grown any?"

"Well, he did," Mira admitted. "But I expect he didn't mean anything by it."

"He's asked that ever since I can remember," said Don Alonzo; "and I'm weary of it. There! And then he says that if I would only take his Green Elixir three times a day for three months, I'd grow like a sapling willow. He hopes to make his living out of me, yet!"

Mrs. Pitkin laughed, comfortably, and smoothed the lad's hair back with a motherly touch. "All the same," she said, "you must quit hiding under the bed when folks come to call, Don 'Lonzo. You

don't want 'em to think I treat you bad, and keep you out o' sight, so's they'll not find it out." Then, seeing the boy's face flush with distress, she added, hastily, "Besides, you're getting to be 'most a man now; I want strangers should know there's men-folks about the place, now Joe's away. There's burglars in town, Don 'Lonzo, and we must look out and keep things shut up close, nights."

"Burglars!" repeated the youth.

"Yes; Deacon Bassett was telling me about 'em just now. I guess likely half what he came for was to give me a good scare, knowing Joe was away. Now, ain't I uncharitable! 'Twas just as likely to be a friendly warning. Anyway, he was telling me they came through from Tupham Corner day before yesterday, and they've been lurking and spying round.

Some boys saw them, coming through Green Gully, and were scared to death at their looks; they said they were big, black-looking men, strangers to these parts; and they swore at the boys and ordered 'em off real ugly. Nobody else has seen them in honest daylight, but they broke into Dan'l Brown's house last night. He's deaf, you know, and didn't hear a sound. They came right into the room where he slept, — Deacon Bassett was there the next day, and saw their tracks all over the floor, — and took ten dollars out of his pants pocket. The pants was hanging right beside the bed, and they turned them clean inside out, and Dan'l never stirred."

"My, oh!" exclaimed Don Alonzo.

"Why, it's terrible!" Mira went on. "Then, last night, they got into Mis' Pegrum's house, too. She's a lone woman,

you know, same as Dan'l is a man. Seems as if they had took note of every house where there wasn't plenty of folks to be stirring and taking notice. They got into the pantry window, and took every living thing she had to eat. They might do that, and still go hungry, Deacon Bassett says; you know there's always been a little feeling between him and Mis' Pegrum; her cat and his hens — it's an old story. Well, and she did hear a noise, and came out into the kitchen, and there sat two great, black men, eating her best peach preserves, and the cake she'd made for the Ladies' Aid, to-day. She was so scare't, she couldn't speak a word; and they just laughed and told her to go back to bed, and she went. Poor-spirited, it seems, but I don't know as I should have done a bit better in her place. There! I wish Joe'd

come back! I feel real nervous, hearing about it all. Oh, and her gold watch, too, they got, and three solid silver teaspoons that belonged to her mother. She's sick abed, Deacon Bassett says, and I don't wonder. I don't feel as if I should sleep a wink to-night!"

The color came into Don Alonzo's thin cheeks. "There sha'n't no one do you any hurt while I'm round, Mira!" he said; and for a moment he forgot his deformity, and straightened his poor shoulders, and held up his head like a man.

There was no shade of amusement in Mira Pitkin's honest smile. "I expect you'd be as brave as a lion, Don 'Lonzo," she said. "I expect you'd shoo 'em right out of the yard, same as you did the turkey gobbler when he run at my red shawl; don't you remember? But all the

same, I hope they will not come; and I shall be glad to see Joe back again."

At that moment the lad caught sight of himself in the little looking-glass that hung over his chest of drawers. Mira, watching him, saw the sparkle go out of his eyes, saw his shoulders droop, and his head sink forward; and she said, quickly:

"But there! we've said enough about the burglars, I should think! How's the experiments, Don 'Lonzo? I heard an awful fizzing going on, just before Deacon Bassett came in. I expect you've got great things hidden under that bed; I expect there's other perils round besides burglars! Joe may come back and find us both blown into kindlin'-wood, after all!"

This was a favorite joke of theirs; she had the pleasure of seeing a smile come into the boy's sad eyes; then, with another

of those motherly touches on his hair, she went away, singing, to her work.

Don Alonzo looked after her. From the way his eyes followed her, she might have been a glorified saint in robe and crown, instead of a rosy-cheeked young woman in a calico gown. "There sha'n't nothing hurt her while I'm round!" he muttered again.

The night fell, dark and cloudy. Mrs. Pitkin went to bed early, after shaking every door and trying every window to make sure that all was safe. Don Alonzo went through the same process twice after she was gone, but he did not feel like sleeping, himself. He lay down on his bed, but his thoughts seemed dancing from one thing to another, — to Brother Joe, travelling homeward now, he hoped, after a week's absence; to Mira's goodness, her

patience with his wayward self, her kindness in letting him mess with chemicals, and turn the shed into a laboratory, and frighten her with explosions; to Dan'l Brown and Mis' Pegrum and the burglars.

Ah, the burglars! What could he do, if they should really come to the house? They were two men, probably well-grown; he — he knew what he was! How could he carry out his promise to Mira, if she should be in actual danger? Not by strength, clearly; but there must be some way; bodily strength was not the only thing in the world. He looked about him, seeking for inspiration; his eyes, wandering here and there, lighted upon something, then remained fixed. The room was dimly lighted by a small lamp, but the corners were dark, and in one of these dark corners something was shining with a faint,

uncertain light. The phosphorescent match-box! He had made it himself, and had ornamented it with a grotesque face in luminous paint. This face now glimmered and glowered at him from the darkness; and Don Alonzo lay still and looked back at it. Lying so and looking, there crept into his mind an old story that he had once read; and he laughed to himself, and then nodded at the glimmering face. "Thank you, old fellow!" said Don Alonzo.

Was there a noise? Was it his imagination, or did a branch snap, a twig rustle down the road? The hunchback had ears like a fox, and in an instant he was at the window, peering out into the darkness. At first he could see nothing; but gradually, the lilac bushes at the gate came into sight, and the clumps of flowers in the

little garden plot. Not a breath was stirring, yet — hark! Again a twig snapped, a branch crackled; and now again! and nearer each time. Don Alonzo strained his eyes to pierce the darkness. Were those bushes, those two shapes by the gate? They were not there a moment ago. Ha! they moved; they were coming nearer. Their feet made no sound on the soft earth, but his sharp ears caught a new sound, — a whisper, faint, yet harsh, like a hiss. Don Alonzo had seen and heard enough. He left the window, and the next moment was diving under the bed.

Mira Pitkin usually slept like a child, from the moment her head touched the pillow till the precise second when something woke in her brain and said "Five o'clock!" But to-night her sleep was

broken. She tossed and muttered in her dreams; and suddenly she sat up in bed with eyes wide open and a distinct sense of something wrong. Her first thought was of fire; she sniffed; the air was pure and clear. Then, like a cry in her ears, came — "The burglars!" She held her breath and listened; was the night as still as it was dark? No! a faint, steady sound came to her ears. A mouse, was it, or — the sound of a tool?

And then, almost noiselessly, a window was opened, the window of the upper entry, next her room. Mira was at her own window in an instant, raising it; that, too, opened silently, for Joe was a carpenter and detested noisy windows. She peered out into the thick darkness. Black, black! Was the blackness deeper there, just at the front door? Surely it was!

Surely something, somebody, was busy with the lock of the door; and then she heard, as Don Alonzo had heard, a low sound like a hiss, beside the soft scraping of the tool. What should she do? The windows were fast, there was a bar and chain inside the door, but what of that? Two desperate men could force an entrance anywhere in a moment. What could she do, a woman, with only a sickly boy to help her? And — who had opened that upper window? Was there a third accomplice — for she thought she could see two spots of deeper blackness by the door — hidden in the house? Oh, if only Joe had borrowed his father's old pistol for her, as she had begged him to do!

Mira opened her lips to shout, in the hope of rousing the nearest neighbors, though they were not very near. Opened

her lips — but no sound came from them. For at that instant something appeared at the window next her own; something stepped from it, out on to the little porch over the front door. Mira Pitkin gasped, and felt her heart fail within her. A skeleton! Every limb outlined in pale fire, the bony fingers points of wavering flame. What awful portent was this? The Thing paused and turned, a frightful face gazed at her for an instant, a hand waved, then the Thing dropped, silent as a shadow, on that spot of deeper blackness that was stooping at the front door.

Then rose an outcry wild and hideous. The burglar shouted hoarsely, and tried to shake off the Thing that sat on his shoulders, gripping his neck with hands of iron, digging his sides with bony knees and feet; but the second thief, who saw by what his

comrade was ridden, shrieked in pure animal terror, uttering unearthly sounds that cut the air like a knife. For a moment he could only stand and shriek; then he turned and fled through the yard, and the other fled after him, the glimmering phantom clutching him tight. Down the road they fled. Mira could now see nothing save the riding Thing, apparently horsed on empty air; but now she saw it, still clutching close with its left hand, raise the right, holding what looked like a shining snake, and bring it down hissing and curling. Again, and again! and with every blow the shrieks grew more and more hideous, till now they had reached the cluster of houses at the head of the street, and every window was flung open, and lights appeared, and voices clamored in terror and amaze. The village was

roused; and now — now, the glimmering skeleton was seen to loose its hold. It dropped from its perch, and turning that awful face toward her once more, came loping back, silent as a shadow. But when she saw that, Mira Pitkin, for the first and last time in her sensible life, fainted away.

When she came to herself, the skeleton was bending over her anxiously, but its face was no longer frightful; it was white and anxious, and the eyes that met hers were piteous with distress.

"My, oh!" cried Don Alonzo. "I vowed no one should do her any hurt, and now I've done it myself."

There was little sleep in the Pitkin house that night. The neighbors came flocking in with cries and questions; and when all was explained, Don Alonzo found

himself the hero of the hour. For once he did not hide under the bed, but received everybody — from Deacon Bassett down to the smallest boy who came running in shirt and trousers, half-awake, and athirst for marvels — with modest pride, and told over and over again how it all happened.

'Twas no great thing, he maintained. He had fooled considerable with phosphorus, and had some of the luminous paint that he had mixed some time before. Thinking about these fellows, he remembered a story he read once, where they painted up a dead body to scare away some murdering robbers. He thought a living person was as good as a dead one, any day; so he tried it on, and it appeared to succeed. He didn't think likely those men would stop short of the next

township, from the way they were running when he got down. Oh, the snake? That was Joe's whip. He presumed likely it hurt some, from the way they yelled.

But the best of all was when Joe came home, the very next day, and when, the three of them sitting about the supper-table, Mira herself told the great story, from the first moment of Deacon Bassett's visit down to the triumphant close — "And I see him coming back, shining like a corpse-candle, and I fell like dead on the floor!"

"There!" she continued, beaming across the table at Joe, as she handed him his fourth cup of coffee, "you may go away again whenever you're a mind to; I sha'n't be afraid. You ain't half the man Don 'Lonzo is!"

"I don't expect I be!" said big Joe, beaming back again.

It seemed to Don Alonzo that their smiles made the kitchen warm as June, though October was falling cold that year.

THE SHED CHAMBER

"Well, I once answered an advertisement in the *Farmer's Friend*, girls, and I have always been glad I did. It was that summer when father broke his arm and the potato crop failed, and everything seemed to be going wrong on the farm. There were plenty of girls to do the work at home, and I thought I ought to get something outside to do if I could. I tried here and there, but without success; at last my eye caught a notice in the *Farmer's Friend*, just the same kind of notice as that you are speaking of, Lottie: 'Wanted, a capable, steady girl to assist in housework and take care of children. Address, with refer-

ence, A. B. C., Dashville.' I talked it over with mother, and she agreed with me; father didn't take so kindly to the idea, naturally; he likes to have us all at home, especially in summer. However, he said I might do as I pleased; so I answered the notice and sent a letter from our pastor, saying what he thought of me. I was almost ashamed to send it, too; he has always been more than kind to me, you know; if I'd been his own daughter he couldn't have said more. Well, they wrote for me to come, and I went.

"Girls, it was pretty hard when it came to that part, leaving the house, and mother standing in the doorway trying not to look anxious, and father fretting and saying it was all nonsense, and he shouldn't have hands enough to pick the apples. Of course he knew I knew better, but I was

glad he didn't want me to go, after all. Sister Nell and Sister Margie had packed my trunk, and they were as excited as I was, and almost wished they were going instead, but not quite, I think; and so Joe whistled to old Senator, and I waved my handkerchief, and mother and the two girls waved their aprons, and off I went.

"I didn't really feel alone till I was in the train and had lost sight of Joe standing and smoothing Senator's mane and nodding at me; then the world seemed very big and Tupham Corner a very small corner in it. I will not say anything more about this part; you'll find it out soon enough yourselves, when you go away from home the first time.

"It was a long journey, or it seemed so then; but everything comes to an end some time, and there was plenty of daylight

left for me to see my new home when I arrived. It was a pleasant-looking house, long and rambling, painted yellow, too, which made me more homesick than ever. There were two children standing in the doorway, and presently Mr. Bowles came out and shook hands with me and helped me down with my things. He was a kind, sensible-looking man, and he made the children come and speak to me and shake hands. They were shy then and hung back, and put their fingers in their mouths; I knew just how they felt. I wanted to hang back, too, when he took me into the house to see Mrs. Bowles. She was an invalid, he told me, and could not leave her room.

"Girls, the minute I saw that sweet, pale face, with the look of pain and patience in it, I knew what I had come

for. I do think we understood each other from the first minute, Mrs. Bowles and I; for she held my hand a good while, looking into my face and I into hers, and she must have seen how sorry I was for her, and how I hoped I could help her; for when I went into the kitchen I heard her say, with a little sigh, as she lay back again, 'O John, I do believe this is the right one at last!' You may believe I made up my mind that I would be the right one, Lottie!

"That kitchen was in a scandalous condition. It was well I had seen Mrs. Bowles first or I should have wanted to run away that very minute. The eldest little girl — it seems strange to think that there ever was a time when I didn't know Barbara's name! — followed me out, — I think her father told her to, — and rubbed along against the wall, just exactly as I used to

when I felt shy. When I asked her a little about where things were, and so on — they were everywhere and nowhere; you never saw such a looking place in your life! — she took her finger out of her mouth, and pretty soon I told her about our yellow coon kittens, and after that we got on very well. She said they had had one girl after another, each worse than the last. The shoe factory had taken off all the good help and left only the incapable ones. The last one, Barbara said, had almost starved them, and been saucy to Mrs. Bowles, and dirty — well, there was no need to tell me that. It was a shame to see good things so destroyed; for the things were good, only all dirty and broken, and — oh, well! there's no use in telling about that part.

"I asked when her mother had had anything to eat, and she said not since noon;

I knew that was no way for an invalid to be taken care of, so I put the kettle on and hunted about till I found a cup and saucer I liked, and then I found the bread-box — oh, dear! that bread-box, girls! But the mold scraped right off, and the bread wasn't really bad; I made some toast and cut the crust off, and put just a thin scrape of butter on it; then I sent Barbara in with a little tray and told her to see that her mother took it all. I thought she'd feel more like taking it from the child than from a stranger, if she hadn't much appetite. My dears, the child came out again in a few minutes, her face all alight.

"'She drank it all, every drop!' she cried. 'And now she's eating the toast. She said how did you know, and she cried, but now she's all right. Father 'most cried, too, I think. Say!'

"'Yes, dear.'

"'Father says the Lord sent you. Did he?'

"I nodded, for I couldn't say anything that minute. I kissed the little girl and went on with my cleaning. Girls, don't ever grudge the time you spend in learning to cook nicely. Food is what keeps the breath of life in us, and it all depends upon us girls now, and later, when we are older women, whether it is good or bad. No, Sue, I'm not going to preach, but I shall never forget how that tired man and those hungry children enjoyed their supper. 'Twas mother's supper, every bit of it, from the light biscuit down to the ham omelette: I found the ham bone in a dark cupboard, all covered with mold, like the bread, but 'twas good and sweet underneath. I only wish mother had been there to see them



"'FATHER SAYS THE LORD SENT YOU. DID HE?'"

eat. After supper Mr. Bowles came and shook hands with me. I didn't know then that he never used any more words than he had to; but I was pleased, if I did think it funny.

"I was tired enough by the time bed-time came, and after I had put the children to bed and seen that Mrs. Bowles was comfortable, and had water and crackers and a candle beside her — she was a very poor sleeper — I was glad enough to go to bed myself. Barbara showed me my room, a pretty little room with sloping gables and windows down by the floor. There were two doors, and I asked her where the other led to. She opened it and said, 'The shed chamber.' I looked over her shoulder, holding up the candle, and saw a great bare room, with some large trunks in it, but no other furniture except a high ward-

robe. I liked the look of the place, for it was a little like our play room in the attic at home; but I was too tired to explore, and I was asleep in ten minutes from the time I had tucked up Barbara in her bed, and Rob and Billy in their double crib.

"I should take a week if I tried to tell you all about those first days; and, after all, it is one particular thing that I started to tell, only there is so much that comes back to me. In a few days I felt that I belonged there, almost as much as at home; they were that kind of people, and made me feel that they cared about me, and not only about what I did. Mrs. Bowles has always been the best friend I have in the world after my own folks; it didn't take us a day to see into each other, and by and by it got to be so that I knew what she wanted almost before she knew, herself.

"At the end of the week Mr. Bowles said he ought to go away on business for a few days, and asked her if she would feel safe to stay with me and the children, or if he should ask his brother to come and sleep in the house.

"'No, indeed!' said Mrs. Bowles. 'I shall feel as safe with Nora as if I had a regiment in the house; a good deal safer!' she added, and laughed.

"So it was settled, and the next day Mr. Bowles went away and I was left in full charge. I suppose I rather liked the responsibility. I asked Mrs. Bowles if I might go all over the house to see how everything fastened, and she said, 'Of course.' The front windows were just common windows, quite high up from the floor; but in the shed chamber, as in my room, they opened near the floor,

and there was no very secure way of fastening them, it seemed to me. However, I wasn't going to say anything to make her nervous, and that was the way they had always had them. If I had only known!

"After the children went to bed that evening I read to Mrs. Bowles for an hour, and then I went to warm up a little cocoa for her; she slept better if she took a drop of something hot the last thing. It was about nine o'clock. I had just got into the kitchen, and was going to light the lamp, when I heard the door open softly.

"'Who's there?' I asked.

"'Only me,' said a girl's voice.

"I lighted my lamp, and saw a girl about my own age, pretty, and showily dressed. She said she was the girl who had left the house a few days ago; she had forgotten something, and might she

go up into the shed chamber and get it? I told her to wait a minute, and went and asked Mrs. Bowles. She said yes, Annie might go up. 'Annie was careless and saucy,' she said, 'but I think she meant no harm. She can go and get her things.'

"I came back and told the girl, and she smiled and nodded. I did not like her smile, I could not tell why. I started to go with her, but she turned on me pretty sharply, and said she had been in the house three months and didn't need to be shown the way by a stranger. I didn't want to put myself forward, but no sooner had she run up-stairs, and I heard her steps in the chamber above me, than something seemed to be pushing, pushing me toward those stairs, whether I would or no. I tried to hold back, and tell myself it was nonsense, and that I was nervous

and foolish; it made no difference, I had to go up-stairs.

"I went softly, my shoes making no noise. My own little room was dark, for I had closed the blinds when the afternoon sun was pouring in hot and bright; but a slender line of light lay across the blackness like a long finger, and I knew the moon was shining in at the windows of the shed chamber. I did a thing I had never done before in my life; that silver finger came through the keyhole, and it drew me to it. I knelt down and looked through.

"The big room shone bare and white in the moonlight; the trunks looked like great animals crouching along the walls. Annie stood in the middle of the room, as if she were waiting or listening for something. Then she slipped off her shoes and

went to one of the windows and opened it. I had fastened it, but the catch was old and she knew the trick of it, of course. In another moment something black appeared over the low sill; it was a man's head. My heart seemed to stand still. She helped him, and he got in without making a sound. He must have climbed up the big elm-tree which grew close against the house. They stood whispering together for a few minutes, but I could not hear a word.

"The man was in stocking feet; he had an evil, coarse face, yet he was good-looking, too, in a way. I thought the girl seemed frightened, and yet pleased, too; and he seemed to be praising her, I thought, and once he put his arms round her and kissed her. She went to the wardrobe and opened it, but he shook his head; then

she opened the great cedar trunk, and he nodded, and measured it and got into it and sat down. It was so deep that he could sit quite comfortably with the cover down. Annie shut it and then opened it again.

"I had seen all I wanted to see. I slipped down-stairs as I heard her move toward the door; when she came down I was stirring my cocoa on the stove, with my back to her. She came round and showed me a bundle she had in her hand, and said she must be going now. I kept my face in the shadow as well as I could, for I was afraid I might not be able to look just as usual; but I spoke quietly, and asked her if she had found everything, and wished her good night as pleasantly as I knew how. All the while my head was in a whirl and my heart beat so loud I thought

she must have heard it. There was a good deal of silver in the house, and I knew that Mr. Bowles had drawn some money from the bank only a day or two before, to pay a life-insurance premium.

"I never listened to anything as I did to the sound of her footsteps; even after they had died away, after she had turned the corner, a good way off, I stood still, listening, not stirring hand or foot. But when I no longer heard any sound my strength seemed to come back with a leap, and I knew what I had to do. I told you my shoes made no noise. I slipped up-stairs, through my own room, and into the shed chamber. Girls, it lay so peaceful and bare in the white moonlight, that for a moment I thought I must have dreamed it all.

"It seemed half a mile to the farther

end, where the great cedar trunk stood. As I went a board creaked under my feet, and I heard — or fancied I heard — a faint rustle inside the trunk. I began to hum a tune, and moved about among the trunks, raising and shutting the lids, as if I were looking for something. Now at last I was beside the dreadful chest, and in another instant I had turned the key. Then, girls, I flew! I knew the lock was a stout one and the wood heavy and hard; it would take the man some time to get it open from the inside, whatever tools he might have. I was down-stairs in one breath, praying that I might be able to control my voice so that it would not sound strange to the sick woman.

"'Would you mind if I went out for a few minutes, Mrs. Bowles? The moonlight is so lovely I thought I would like to

take a little walk, if there is nothing you want.'

"She looked surprised, but said in her kind way, yes, certainly I might go, only I'd better not go far.

"I thanked her, and walked quietly out to the end of the garden walk; then I ran! Girls, I had no idea I could run so! Strength seemed given me, for I never felt my body. I was like a spirit flying or a wind blowing. The road melted away before me, and all the time I saw two things before my eyes as plain as I see you now, — the evil-faced man working away at the lock of the cedar chest, and the sweet lady sitting in the room below with her Bible on her knee. Yes, I thought of the children, too, but it seemed to me no one, not even the wickedest, could wish to hurt a child. So on I ran!

"I reached the first house, but I knew there was no man there, only two nervous old ladies. At the next house I should find two men, George Brett and his father.

"Yes, Lottie, my George, but I had never seen him then. He had only lately come back from college. The first I saw of him was two minutes later, when I ran almost into his arms as he came out of the house. I can see him now, in the moonlight, tall and strong, with his surprised eyes on me. I must have been a wild figure, I suppose. I could hardly speak, but somehow I made him understand.

"He turned back to the door and shouted to his father, who came hurrying out; then he looked at me. 'Can you run back?' he asked.

"I nodded. I had no breath for words but plenty for running, I thought.

"'Come on, then!'

"Girls, it was twice as easy running with that strong figure beside me. I noticed in all my hurry and distress how easily he ran, and I felt my feet, that had grown heavy in the last few steps, light as air again. Once I sobbed for breath, and he took my hand as we ran, saying, 'Courage, brave girl!' We ran on hand in hand, and I never failed again. We heard Mr. Br t's feet running, not far behind; he was a strong, active man, but could not quite keep up with us.

"As we neared the house, 'Quiet,' I said; 'Mrs. Bowles does not know.'

"He nodded, and we slipped in at the back door. In an instant his shoes were off and he was up the back stairs like a cat, and I after him. As we entered the shed chamber the lid of the cedar trunk rose.

I saw the gleam of the evil black eyes and the shine of white, wolfish teeth. Without a sound George Brett sprang past me; without a sound the robber leaped to meet him. I saw them in the white light as they clinched and stood locked together; then a mist came before my eyes and I saw nothing more.

"I did not actually faint, I think; it cannot have been more than a few minutes before I came to myself. But when I looked again George was kneeling with his knee on the man's breast, holding him down, and Father Brett was looking about the chamber and saying, in his dry way, 'Now where in Tunkett is the clothes-line to tie this fellow?'

"And the girl? Annie? O girls, she was so young! She was just my own age and she had no mother. I went to see her the

next day, and many days after that. We are fast friends now, and she is a good, steady girl; and no one knows — no one except our two selves and two others — that she was ever in the shed chamber."

MAINE TO THE RESCUE

MAINE TO THE RESCUE

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! It's snowing!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! It's snowing!"

Massachusetts looked up from her algebra. She was the head of the school. She was rosy and placid as the apple she was generally eating when not in class. Apples and algebra were the things she cared most about in school life.

"Whence come these varying cries?" she said, taking her feet off the fender and trying to be interested, though her thoughts went on with "a $\frac{1}{6}$ b =" etc.

"Oh, Virginia is grumbling because it is snowing, and Maine is feeling happy over it, that's all!" said Rhode Island, the smallest girl in Miss Wayland's school.

"Poor Virginia! It is rather hard on you to have snow in March, when you have just got your box of spring clothes from home."

"It is atrocious!" said Virginia, a tall, graceful, languishing girl. "How could they send me to such a place, where it is winter all the spring? Why, at home the violets are in blossom, the trees are coming out, the birds singing —"

"And at home," broke in Maine, who was a tall girl, too, but lithe and breezy as a young willow, with flyaway hair and dancing brown eyes, "at home all is winter — white, beautiful, glorious winter, with ice two or three feet thick on the rivers, and great fields and fields of snow, all sparkling in the sun, and the sky a vast sapphire overhead, without a speck. Oh, the glory of it, the splendor of it! And

here — here it is neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. A wretched, make-shift season, which they call winter because they don't know what else to call it."

"Come! come!" said Old New York, who was seventeen years old and had her own ideas of dignity. "Let us alone, you two outsiders! We are neither Eskimos nor Hindoos, it is true, but the Empire State would not change climates with either of you."

"No, indeed!" chimed in Young New York, who always followed her leader in everything, from opinions down to hair-ribbons.

"No, indeed!" repeated Virginia, with languid scorn. "Because you couldn't get any one to change with you, my dear."

Young New York reddened. "You are so disagreeable, Virginia!" she said. "I

am sure I am glad I don't have to live with you all the year round — "

"Personal remarks!" said Massachusetts, looking up calmly. "One cent, Young New York, for the missionary fund. Thank you! Let me give you each half an apple, and you will feel better."

She solemnly divided a large red apple, and gave the halves to the two scowling girls, who took them, laughing in spite of themselves, and went their separate ways.

"Why didn't you let them have it out, Massachusetts?" said Maine, laughing. "You never let any one have a good row."

"Slang!" said Massachusetts, looking up again. "One cent for the missionary fund. You will clothe the heathen at this rate, Maine. That is the fourth cent to-day."

"'Row' isn't slang!" protested Maine, feeling, however, for her pocket-book.

"Vulgar colloquial!" returned Massachusetts, quietly. "And perhaps you would go away now, Maine, or else be quiet. Have you learned —"

"No, I haven't!" said Maine. "I will do it very soon, dear Saint Apple. I must look at the snow a little more."

Maine went dancing off to her room, where she threw the window open and looked out with delight. The girl caught up a double handful and tossed it about, laughing for pure pleasure. Then she leaned out to feel the beating of the flakes on her face.

"Really quite a respectable little snowstorm!" she said, nodding approval at the whirling white drift. "Go on, and you will be worth while, my dear." She went

singing to her algebra, which she could not have done if it had not been snowing.

The snow went on increasing from hour to hour. By noon the wind began to rise; before night it was blowing a furious gale. Furious blasts clutched at the windows, and rattled them like castanets. The wind howled and shrieked and moaned, till it seemed as if the air were filled with angry demons fighting to possess the square white house.

Many of the pupils of Miss Wayland's school came to the tea-table with disturbed faces; but Massachusetts was as calm as usual, and Maine was jubilant.

"Isn't it a glorious storm?" she cried, exultingly. "I didn't know there could be such a storm in this part of the country, Miss Wayland. Will you give me some milk, please?"

"There is no milk, my dear," said Miss Wayland, who looked rather troubled. "The milkman has not come, and probably will not come to-night. There has never been such a storm here in my lifetime!" she added. "Do you have such storms at home, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" Maine said, cheerfully. "I don't know that we often have so much wind as this, but the snow is nothing out of the way. Why, on Palm Sunday last year our milkman dug through a drift twenty feet deep to get at his cows. He was the only milkman who ventured out, and he took me and the minister's wife to church in his little red pung.

"We were the only women in church, I remember. Miss Betsy Follansbee, who had not missed going to church in fifteen years, started on foot, after climbing out of

her bedroom window to the shed roof and sliding down. All her doors were blocked up, and she lived alone, so there was no one to dig her out. But she got stuck in a drift about half-way, and had to stay there till one of the neighbors came by and pulled her out."

All the girls laughed at this, and even Miss Wayland smiled; but suddenly she looked grave again.

"Hark!" she said, and listened. "Did you not hear something?"

"We hear Boreas, Auster, Eurus, and Zephyrus," answered Old New York. "Nothing else."

At that moment there was a lull in the screeching of the wind; all listened intently, and a faint sound was heard from without which was not that of the blast.

"A child!" said Massachusetts, rising quickly. "It is a child's voice. I will go, Miss Wayland."

"I cannot permit it, Alice!" cried Miss Wayland, in great distress. "I cannot allow you to think of it. You are just recovering from a severe cold, and I am responsible to your parents. What shall we do? It certainly sounds like a child crying out in the pitiless storm. Of course it *may* be a cat —"

Maine had gone to the window at the first alarm, and now turned with shining eyes.

"It *is* a child!" she said, quietly. "I have no cold, Miss Wayland. I am going, of course."

Passing by Massachusetts, who had started out of her usual calm and stood in some perplexity, she whispered, "If it

were freezing, it wouldn't cry. I shall be in time. Get a ball of stout twine."

She disappeared. In three minutes she returned, dressed in her blanket coat, reaching half-way below her knees, scarlet leggings and gaily wrought moccasins; on her head a fur cap, with a band of sea-otter fur projecting over her eyes. In her hand she held a pair of snow-shoes. She had had no opportunity to wear her snow-shoeing suit all winter, and she was quite delighted.

"My child!" said Miss Wayland, faintly. "How can I let you go? My duty to your parents — what are those strange things, and what use are you going to make of them?"

By way of answer Maine slipped her feet into the snow-shoes, and, with Massachusetts' aid, quickly fastened the thongs.

"The twine!" she said. "Yes, that will do; plenty of it. Tie it to the door-handle, square knot, so! I'm all right, dear; don't worry." Like a flash the girl was gone out into the howling night.

Miss Wayland wrung her hands and wept, and most of the girls wept with her. Virginia, who was curled up in a corner, really sick with fright, beckoned to Massachusetts.

"Is there any chance of her coming back alive?" she asked, in a whisper. "I wish I had made up with her. But we may all die in this awful storm."

"Nonsense!" said Massachusetts. "Try to have a little sense, Virginia! Maine is all right, and can take care of herself; and as for whimpering at the wind, when you have a good roof over your head, it is too absurd."

For the first time since she came to school Massachusetts forgot the study hour, as did every one else; and in spite of her brave efforts at cheerful conversation, it was a sad and an anxious group that sat about the fire in the pleasant parlor.

Maine went out quickly, and closed the door behind her; then stood still a moment, listening for the direction of the cry. She did not hear it at first, but presently it broke out — a piteous little wail, sounding louder now in the open air. The girl bent her head to listen. Where was the child? The voice came from the right, surely! She would make her way down to the road, and then she could tell better.

Grasping the ball of twine firmly, she stepped forward, planting the broad snow-shoes lightly in the soft, dry snow. As she turned the corner of the house an icy

blast caught her, as if with furious hands, shook her like a leaf, and flung her roughly against the wall.

Her forehead struck the corner, and for a moment she was stunned; but the blood trickling down her face quickly brought her to herself. She set her teeth, folded her arms tightly, and stooping forward, measured her strength once more with that of the gale.

This time it seemed as if she were cleaving a wall of ice, which opened only to close behind her. On she struggled, unrolling her twine as she went.

The child's cry sounded louder, and she took fresh heart. Pausing, she clapped her hand to her mouth repeatedly, uttering a shrill, long call. It was the Indian whoop, which her father had taught her in their woodland rambles at home.

The childish wail stopped; she repeated the cry louder and longer; then shouted, at the top of her lungs, "Hold on! Help is coming!"

Again and again the wind buffeted her, and forced her backward a step or two; but she lowered her head, and wrapped her arms more tightly about her body, and plodded on.

Once she fell, stumbling over a stump; twice she ran against a tree, for the white darkness was absolutely blinding, and she saw nothing, felt nothing but snow, snow. At last her snow-shoe struck something hard. She stretched out her hands — it was the stone wall. And now, as she crept along beside it, the child's wail broke out again close at hand.

"Mother! O mother! mother!"

The girl's heart beat fast.

"Where are you?" she cried. At the same moment she stumbled against something soft. A mound of snow, was it? No! for it moved. It moved and cried, and little hands clutched her dress.

She saw nothing, but put her hands down, and touched a little cold face. She dragged the child out of the snow, which had almost covered it, and set it on its feet.

"Who are you?" she asked, putting her face down close, while by vigorous patting and rubbing she tried to give life to the benumbed, cowering little figure, which staggered along helplessly, clutching her with half-frozen fingers.

"Benny Withers!" sobbed the child. "Mother sent me for the clothes, but I can't get 'em!"

"Benny Withers!" cried Maine. "Why

you live close by. Why didn't you go home, child?"

"I can't!" cried the boy. "I can't see nothing. I tried to get to the school, an' I tried to get home, an' I can't get nowhere 'cept against this wall. Let me stay here now! I want to rest me a little."

He would have sunk down again, but Maine caught him up in her strong, young arms.

"Here, climb up on my back, Benny!" she said, cheerfully. "Hold on tight round my neck, and you shall rest while I take you home. So! That's a brave boy! Upsy, now! there you are! Now put your head on my shoulder — close! and hold on!"

Ah! how Maine blessed the heavy little brother at home, who *would* ride on his

sister's back, long after mamma said he was too big. How she blessed the carryings up and down stairs, the "horsey rides" through the garden and down the lane, which had made her shoulders strong!

Benny Withers was eight years old, but he was small and slender, and no heavier than six-year-old Philip. No need of telling the child to hold on, once he was up out of the cruel snow bed. He clung desperately round the girl's neck, and pressed his head close against the woollen stuff.

Maine pulled her ball of twine from her pocket — fortunately it was a large one, and the twine, though strong, was fine, so that there seemed to be no end to it — and once more lowered her head, and set her teeth, and moved forward, keeping close to

the wall, in the direction of Mrs. Withers's cottage.

For awhile she saw nothing, when she looked up under the fringe of otter fur, which, long and soft, kept the snow from blinding her; nothing but the white, whirling drift which beat with icy, stinging blows in her face. But at last her eyes caught a faint glimmer of light, and presently a brighter gleam showed her Mrs. Withers's gray cottage, now white like the rest of the world.

Bursting open the cottage door, she almost threw the child into the arms of his mother.

The woman, who had been weeping wildly, could hardly believe her eyes. She caught the little boy and smothered him with kisses, chafing his cold hands, and crying over him.

"I didn't know!" she said. "I didn't know till he was gone. I told him at noon he was to go, never thinking 'twould be like this. I was sure he was lost and dead, but I couldn't leave my sick baby. Bless you, whoever you are, man or woman! But stay and get warm, and rest ye! You're never going out again in this awful storm!"

But Maine was gone.

In Miss Wayland's parlor the suspense was fast becoming unendurable. They had heard Maine's Indian whoop, and some of them, Miss Wayland herself among the number, thought it was a cry of distress; but Massachusetts rightly interpreted the call, and assured them that it was a call of encouragement to the bewildered child.

Then came silence within the house, and

a prolonged clamor — a sort of witches' chorus, with wailing and shrieking without. Once a heavy branch was torn from one of the great elms, and came thundering down on the roof. This proved the finishing touch for poor Virginia. She went into violent hysterics, and was carried off to bed by Miss Wayland and Old New York.

Massachusetts presently ventured to explore a little. She hastened through the hall to the front door, opened it a few inches, and put her hand on the twine which was fastened to the handle. What was her horror to find that it hung loose, swinging idly in the wind! Sick at heart, she shut the door, and pressing her hands over her eyes, tried to think.

Maine must be lost in the howling storm! She must find her; but where and how?

Oh! if Miss Wayland had only let her go at first! She was older; it would not have mattered so much.

But now, quick! she would wrap herself warmly, and slip out without any one knowing.

The girl was turning to fly up-stairs, when suddenly something fell heavily against the door outside. There was a fumbling for the handle; the next moment it flew open, and something white stumbled into the hall, shut the door, and sat down heavily on the floor.

"Personal — rudeness!" gasped Maine, struggling for breath. "You shut the door in my face! One cent for the missionary fund."

The great storm was over. The sun came up, and looked down on a strange,

white world. No fences, no walls; only a smooth ridge where one of these had been. Trees which the day before had been quite tall now looked like dwarfs, spreading their broad arms not far from the snow carpet beneath them. Road there was none; all was smooth, save where some huge drift nodded its crest like a billow curling for its downward rush.

Maine, spite of her scarred face, which showed as many patches as that of a court lady in King George's times, was jubilant. Tired! not a bit of it! A little stiff, just enough to need "limbering out," as they said at home.

"There is no butter!" she announced at breakfast. "There is no milk, no meat for dinner. Therefore, I go a-snow-shoeing. Dear Miss Wayland, let me go! I have learned my algebra, and I shall be dis-

covering unknown quantities at every step, which will be just as instructive."

Miss Wayland could refuse nothing to the heroine of last night's adventure. Behold Maine, therefore, triumphant, sallying forth, clad once more in her blanket suit, and dragging her sled behind her.

There was no struggling now — no hand-to-hand wrestling with storm-demons. The sun laughed from a sky as blue and deep as her own sky of Maine, and the girl laughed with him as she walked along, the powdery snow flying in a cloud from her snow-shoes at every step.

Such a sight had never been seen in Mentor village before. The people came running to their upper windows — their lower ones were for the most part buried in snow — and stared with all their eyes at the strange apparition.

In the street, life was beginning to stir. People had found, somewhat to their own surprise, that they were alive and well after the blizzard; and knots of men were clustered here and there, discussing the storm, while some were already at work tunnelling through the drifts.

Mr. Perkins, the butcher, had just got his door open, and great was his amazement when Maine hailed him from the top of a great drift, and demanded a quarter of mutton with some soup meat.

"Yes, miss!" he stammered, open-mouthed with astonishment. "I — I've got the meat; but I wasn't — my team isn't out this morning. I don't know about sending it."

"I have a 'team' here!" said Maine, quietly, pulling her sled alongside. "Give me the mutton, Mr. Perkins: you may



"MAINE HAILED HIM FROM THE TOP OF A GREAT DRIFT."

charge it to Miss Wayland, please, and I will take it home."

The butter-man and the grocer were visited in the same way, and Maine, rather embarrassed by the concentrated observation of the whole village, turned to pull her laden sled back, when suddenly a window was thrown open, and a voice exclaimed:

"Young woman! I will give you ten dollars for the use of those snow-shoes for an hour!"

Maine looked up in amazement, and laughed merrily when she saw the well-known countenance of the village doctor.

"What! You, my dear young lady?" cried the good man. "This is 'Maine to the Rescue,' indeed! I might have known it was you. But I repeat my offer. Make it anything you please, only let me have

the snow-shoes. I cannot get a horse out, and have two patients dangerously ill. What is your price for the magic shoes?"

"My price, doctor?" repeated Maine, looking up with dancing eyes. "My price is — one cent. For the Missionary Fund! The snow-shoes are yours, and I will get home somehow with my sled and the mutton."

So she did, and Doctor Fowler made his calls with the snow-shoes, and saved a life, and brought cheer and comfort to many. But it was ten dollars, and not one cent, which he gave to the Missionary Fund.

THE SCARLET LEAVES

THE SCARLET LEAVES

"THE Committee will please come to order!" said Maine.

"What's up?" asked Massachusetts, pausing in her occupation of peeling chestnuts.

"Why, you know well enough, Massachusetts. Here it is Wednesday, and we don't know yet what we are going to do on Friday evening. We must do something, or go shamed to our graves. Never a senior class has missed its Frivolous Friday, since the school began."

"Absolutely no hope of the play?"

"None! Alma's part is too important; no one could possibly take it at two days' notice. Unless — they say Chicago has a

real gift for acting; but somehow, I don't feel as if she were the person."

"I should bar that, positively," put in Tennessee. "In the first place, Chicago has not been here long enough to be identified with the class. She is clever, of course, or she could not have entered junior last year; but — well, it isn't necessary to say anything more; she is out of the question."

"It is too exasperating!" said Massachusetts. "Alma might have waited another week before coming down with measles."

"It's harder for her than for any one else, Massachusetts," said Maine. "Poor dear; she almost cried her eyes out yesterday, when the spots appeared, and there was no more doubt."

"Yes, I know that; she is a poor, unfortunate Lamb, and I love her, you know

I do; still, a growl may be permitted, Maine. There's nothing criminal in a growl. The question is, as you were saying, what shall we do?"

"A dance?"

"We had a dance last week!" said Maine; "at least the sophomores did, and we don't want to copy them."

"A straw-ride?"

"A candy-pull?"

"A concert?"

"The real question is," said Tennessee, cracking her chestnut leisurely, "what does Maine intend to do? If she thinks we made her Class President because we meant to arrange things ourselves, she is more ignorant than I supposed her. Probably she has the whole thing settled in her Napoleonic mind. Out with it, Moosetocmaguntic!"

Maine smiled, and looked round her. The Committee was clustered in a group at the foot of a great chestnut-tree, at the very edge of a wood. The leaves were still thick on the trees, and the October sun shone through their golden masses, pouring a flood of warmth and light down on the greensward, sprinkled with yellow leaves and half-open chestnut burrs. Massachusetts and Tennessee, sturdy and four-square as their own hills; Old New York and New Jersey, and Maine herself, a tall girl with clear, kind eyes, and a color that came and went as she talked. This was the Committee.

"Well," said Maine, modestly. "I did have an idea, girls. I don't know whether you will approve or not, but — what do you say to a fancy ball?"

"A fancy ball! at two days' notice!"



THE CONFEERNCE.

"Penobscot is losing her mind. Pity to see it shattered, for it was once a fine organ."

"Be quiet, Tennessee! I don't mean anything elaborate, of course. But I thought we might have an informal frolic, and dress up in — oh, anything we happened to have. Not call it a dance, but have dancing all the same; don't you see? There are all kinds of costumes that can be got up with very little trouble, and no expense to speak of."

"For example!" said Massachusetts. "She has it all arranged, girls; all we have to do is to sit back and let wisdom flow in our ears."

"Massachusetts, if you tease me any more, *I'll* sit back, and let you do it all yourself. Well, then — let me see! Tennessee — to tell the truth, I didn't sleep

very well last night; my head ached; and I amused myself by planning a few costumes, just in case you should fancy the idea."

"Quack! quack!" said Massachusetts. "I didn't mean to interrupt, but you *are* a duck, and I must just show that I can speak your language. Go on!"

"Tennessee, I thought you might be an Indian. You must have something that will show your hair. With my striped shawl for a blanket, and the cock's feather out of Jersey's hat — what do you think?"

"Perfect!" said Tennessee. "And I can try effects with my new paint-box, one cheek stripes, the other spots. Hurrah! next!"

"Old New York, you must be a flower of some kind. Or — why not a basket of

flowers? You could have a basket-work bodice, don't you see? and flowers coming out of it all round your neck — your neck is so pretty, you ought to show it — "

"Or carrots and turnips!" said the irrepressible Massachusetts. "Call her a Harvest Hamper, and braid her lovely locks with strings of onions!"

"Thank you," laughed Old New York, a slender girl whose flower-like beauty made her a pleasure to look at. "I think I'll keep to the posy, Massachusetts. Go on, Maine! what shall Massachusetts be, and what will you be yourself?"

"Massachusetts ought by rights to be an apple, a nice fat rosy apple; but I don't quite know how that can be managed."

"Then I shall be a codfish!" said Massachusetts, decidedly. "I am not going to

desert Mr. Micawber — I mean the Bay State. I shall go as a salt codfish. *Dixi!* Pass on to the Pine-Tree!"

"Why, so I might be a pine-tree! I didn't think of that. But still, I don't think I will; I meant to be October. The leaves at home are so glorious in October, and I saw some scarlet leaves yesterday that will be lovely for chaplets and garlands."

"What are they? the maples don't turn red here — too near the sea, I suppose."

"I don't know what they are. Pointed leaves, rather long and delicate, and the most splendid color you ever saw. There is just this one little tree, near the cross-road by the old stone house. I haven't seen anything like it about here. I found it yesterday, and just stood and looked at it, it was so beautiful. Yes, I shall be

October; I'll decide on that. What's that rustling in the wood? aren't we all here? I thought I heard something moving among the trees. I do believe some one is in there, Massachusetts."

"I was pulling down a branch; don't be imaginative, my dear. Well, go on! are we to make out all the characters?"

"Why — I thought not. Some of the girls will like better to choose their own, don't you think? I thought we, as the Committee, might make out a list of suggestions, though, and then they can do as they please. But now, I wish some of you others would suggest something; I don't want to do it all."

"Daisy will have to be her namesake, of course," said Tennessee.

"Jersey can be a mosquito," said Old New York; "she's just the figure for it."

"Thank you!" said Jersey, who weighed ninety pounds. "Going on that theory, Pennsylvania ought to go as an elephant, and Rhode Island as a giraffe."

"And Chicago as a snake — no! I didn't mean that!" cried Maine.

"You said it! you said it!" cried several voices, in triumph.

"The Charitable Organ has called names at last!" said Jersey, laughing. "And she has hit it exactly. Now, Maine, what is the use of looking pained? the girl *is* a snake — or a sneak, which amounts to the same thing. Let us have truth, I say, at all hazards."

"I am sorry!" said Maine, simply. "I am not fond of Chicago, and that is the very reason why I should not call her names behind her back. It slipped out before I knew it; I am sorry and ashamed, and that is all

there is to say. And now, suppose we go home, and tell the other girls about the party."

The Committee trooped off across the hill, laughing and talking, Maine alone grave and silent. As their voices died away, the ferns nodded beside a great pine-tree that stood just within the border of the wood, not six yards from where they had been sitting. A slender dark girl rose from the fern-clump in which she had been crouching, and shook the pine-needles from her dress. Very cautiously she parted the screen of leaves, and looked after the retreating girls.

"That was worth while!" she said; and her voice, though quiet, was full of ugly meaning. "Snakes can hear, Miss Oracle, and bite, too. We'll see about those scarlet leaves!"

PART II.

"Tra la, tra lee,
I want my tea!"

Sang Tennessee, as she ran up-stairs. "Oh, Maine, is that you? my dear, my costume is simply too perfect for anything. I've been out in the woods, practising my war-whoop. Three yelps and a screech; I flatter myself it is the *most* blood-curdling screech you ever heard. I'm going to have a dress-rehearsal now, all by myself. Come and see — why, what's the matter, Maine? something is wrong with you. What is it?"

"Oh! nothing serious," said Maine, trying to speak lightly. "I must get up another costume, that's all, and there isn't much time."

"Why! what has happened?"

"The scarlet leaves are gone."

"Gone! fallen, do you mean?"

"No! some one has cut or broken every branch. There is not one left. The leaves made the whole costume, you see; it amounts to nothing without them, merely a yellow gown."

"Oh! my dear, what a shame! Who could have taken them?"

"I cannot imagine. I thought I would get them to-day, and keep them in water over night, so as to have them all ready to-morrow. Oh, well, it can't be helped. I can call myself a sunflower, or Black-eyed Susan, or some other yellow thing. It's absurd to mind, of course, only—"

"Only, being human, you do mind," said Tennessee, putting her arm round her friend's waist. "I should think so, dear. We don't care about having you canonized just yet. But, Maine, there must be more

red leaves somewhere. This comes of living near the sea. Now, in my mountains, or in your woods, we could just go out and fill our arms with glory in five minutes, whichever way we turned. These murmuring pines and — well, I don't know that there are any hemlocks — are all very splendid, and no one loves them better than I do; but for a Harvest festival decoration, '*Ils ne sont pas là dedans*,' as the French have it."

"Slang, Tennessee! one cent!"

"On the contrary; foreign language, mark of commendation.

"But come now, and see my war-dance. I didn't mean to let any one see it beforehand, but you are a dear old thing, and you shall. And then, we can take counsel about your costume. Not that I have the smallest anxiety about that; I've no doubt

you have thought of something pretty already. I don't see how you do it. When any one says 'Clothes' to me, I never can think of anything but red flannel petticoats, if you will excuse my mentioning the article. I think Black-eyed Susan sounds delightful. How would you dress for it? you have the pretty yellow dress all ready."

"I should put brown velveteen with it. I have quite a piece left over from my blouse. I'll get some yellow crêpe paper, and make a hat, or cap, with a brown crown, you know, and yellow petals for the brim; and have a brown bodice laced together over the full yellow waist, and — "

The two girls passed on, talking cheerfully — it is always soothing to talk about pretty clothes, especially when one is as clever as Maine was, and can make, as

Massachusetts used to say, a court train out of a jack-towel.

A few minutes after, Massachusetts came along the same corridor, and tapped at another door. Hearing "Come in!" she opened the door and looked in.

"Busy, Chicago? beg pardon! Miss Cram asked me, as I was going by, to show you the geometry lesson, as you were not in class yesterday."

"Thanks! come in, won't you?" said Chicago, rising ungraciously from her desk. "I was going to ask Miss Cram, of course, but I'm much obliged."

Massachusetts pointed out the lesson briefly, and turned to go, when her eyes fell on a jar set on the ground, behind the door.

"Hallo!" she said, abruptly. "You've got scarlet leaves, too. Where did you get them?"

"I found them," said Chicago, coldly. "They were growing wild, on the public highway. I had a perfect right to pick them."

There was a defiant note in her voice, and Massachusetts looked at her with surprise. The girl's eyes glittered with an uneasy light, and her dark cheek was flushed.

"I don't question your right," said Massachusetts, bluntly, "but I do question your sense. I may be mistaken, but I don't believe those leaves are very good to handle. They look to me uncommonly like dogwood. I'm not sure; but if I were you, I would show them to Miss Flower before I touched them again."

She nodded and went out, dismissing the matter from her busy mind.

"Spiteful!" said Chicago, looking after her sullenly.

"She suspects where I got the leaves, and thinks she can frighten me out of wearing them. I never saw such a hateful set of girls as there are in this school. Never mind, sweet creatures! The 'snake' has got the scarlet leaves, and she knows when she has got a good thing."

She took some of the leaves from the jar, and held them against her black hair. They were brilliantly beautiful, and became her well. She looked in the glass and nodded, well pleased with what she saw there; then she carefully clipped the ends of the branches, and put fresh water in the jar before replacing them.

"Indian Summer will take the shine out of Black-eyed Susan, I'm afraid," she said to herself. "Poor Susan, I am sorry for her." She laughed; it was not a pleasant laugh; and went back to her books.

PART III.

"What a pretty sight!"

It was Miss Wayland who spoke. She and the other teachers were seated on the raised platform at the end of the gymnasium. The long room was wreathed with garlands and brilliantly lighted, and they were watching the girls as they flitted by in their gay dresses, to the waltz that good Miss Flower was playing.

"How ingenious the children are!" Miss Wayland continued. "Look at Virginia there, as Queen Elizabeth! Her train is my old party cloak turned inside out, and her petticoat — you recognize that?"

"I, not!" said Mademoiselle, peering forward. "I am too near of my sight. What ees it?"

"The piano cover. That Persian silk,

you know, that my brother sent me. I never knew how handsome it was before. The ruff, and those wonderful puffed sleeves, are mosquito-netting; the whole effect is superb — at a little distance."

"I thought Virginie not suffeeciently clayver for to effect zis!" said Mademoiselle. "Of custome, she shows not — what do you say? — invention."

"Oh, she simply wears the costume, with her own peculiar little air of dignity. Maine designed it. Maine is costumer in chief. The Valiant Three, Maine, Massachusetts, and Tennessee, took all the unpractical girls in hand, and simply — dressed them. *Entre nous*, Mademoiselle, I wish, in some cases, that they would do it every day."

"*Et moi aussi!*" exclaimed Mademoiselle, nodding eagerly.

"Maine herself is lovely," said Miss Cram. "I think hers is really the prettiest costume in the room; all that soft brown and yellow is really charming, and suits her to perfection."

"Yes; and I am so glad of it, for the child was sadly disappointed about some other costume she had planned, and got this up almost at the last moment. She is a clever child, and a good one. Do look at Massachusetts! Massachusetts, my dear child, what do you call yourself? you are a most singular figure."

"The Codfish. Miss Wayland; straight from Boston State-House. Admire my tail, please! I got up at five o'clock this morning to finish it, and I must confess I am proud of it."

She flapped her tail, which was a truly astonishing one, made of newspapers neatly

plaited and sewed together, and wriggled her body, clad in well-fitting scales of silver paper. "Quite a fish, I flatter myself?" she said, insinuatingly.

"Very like a whale, if not like a codfish," said Miss Wayland, laughing heartily. "You certainly are one of the successes of the evening, Massachusetts, and the Mosquito is another, in that filmy gray. Is that mosquito-netting, too? I congratulate you both on your skill. By the way, what does Chicago represent? she is very effective, with all those scarlet leaves. What are they, I wonder!"

Massachusetts turned hastily, and a low whistle came from her lips. "Whew! I beg pardon, Miss Wayland. It was the codfish whistled, not I; it's a way they have on Friday evenings. I told that girl to ask Miss Flower about those

leaves; I am afraid they are — oh, here is Miss Flower!" as the good botany teacher came towards them, rather out of breath after her playing.

"Miss Flower, what are those leaves, please? those in Chicago's hair, and on her dress."

Miss Flower looked, and her cheerful face grew grave.

"*Rhus veneneta*," she said; "poison dogwood."

"I was afraid so!" said Massachusetts. "I told her yesterday that I thought they were dogwood, and advised her to show them to you before she touched them again."

"Poor child!" said kind Miss Flower. "She has them all about her face and neck, too. We must get them off at once."

She was starting forward, but Miss Wayland detained her.

"The mischief is done now, is it not?" she said. "And after all, dogwood does not poison every one. I have had it in my hands, and never got the smallest injury. Suppose we let her have her evening, at least till after supper, which will be ready now in a few minutes. If she is affected by the poison, this is her last taste of the Harvest Festivities."

They watched the girl. She was receiving compliments on her striking costume, from one girl and another, and was in high spirits. She glanced triumphantly about her, her eyes lighting up when they fell on Maine in her yellow dress. She certainly looked brilliantly handsome, the flaming scarlet of the leaves setting off her dark skin and flashing eyes to perfection.

Presently she put her hand up to her cheek, and held it there a moment.

"Aha!" said Massachusetts, aloud. "She's in for it!"

"In for what?" said Maine, who came up at that moment. Following the direction of Massachusetts' eyes, she drew her apart, and spoke in a low tone. "I shall not say anything, Massachusetts, and I hope you will not. Don't you know?" she added, seeing her friend's look of inquiry. "Those are my scarlet leaves."

"No!"

"Yes. I have found out all about it. Daisy lingered behind the rest of us the other day, when I had been telling you all about the leaves, to pick blackberries. She saw Chicago come out of the wood a few minutes after we left, looking black as thunder. Don't you remember, I thought I heard a rustling in the fern, and you laughed at me? She was hidden there, and

heard every word we said. Next day the leaves were gone, and now they are on Chicago's dress instead of mine."

"And a far better place for them!" exclaimed Massachusetts, "though I am awfully sorry for her. Oh! you lucky, lucky girl! and you dear, precious, stupid ignoramus, not to know poison dogwood when you see it."

"Poison dogwood! those beautiful leaves!"

"Those beautiful leaves. That young woman is in for about two weeks of as pretty a torture as ever Inquisitor or Iroquois could devise. I know all about it, though there was a time when I also was ignorant. Look! she is feeling of her cheek already; it begins to sting. To-morrow she will be all over patches, red and white; itching — there is nothing to

describe the itching. It is beyond words. Next day her face will begin to swell, and in two days more — the School Birthday, my dear — she will be like nothing human, a mere shapeless lump of pain and horror. She will not sleep by night or rest by day. She will go home to her parents, and they will not know her, but will think we have sent them a smallpox patient by mistake. Her eyes —"

"Oh, hush! hush, Massachusetts!" cried Maine. "Oh! poor thing! poor thing! what shall I do? I feel as if it were all my fault, somehow."

"Your fault that she sneaked and eavesdropped, and then stole your decoration? Oh! come, Maine, don't be fantastic!"

"No, Massachusetts, I don't mean that. But if I had only known, myself, what they were, I should never have spoken of

them, and all this would never have happened."

"The moral of which is, study botany!" said Massachusetts.

"I'll begin to-morrow!" said Maine.

"And what is to be the end of the dogwood story, I wonder!" said Tennessee, meeting Massachusetts in a breathless interval between two exercises on the School Birthday, the crowning event of the Harvest Festivities at Miss Wayland's. "Have you heard the last chapter?"

"No! what is it?"

"Maine is in a dark room with the moaning Thing that was Chicago, singing to her, and telling her about the speeches and things last night. She vows she will not come out again to-day, just because she was at chapel and heard the singing this

morning; says that was the best of it, and she doesn't care much about dancing. Maine! and Miss Wayland will not let us break in the door and carry her off bodily; says she will be happier where she is, and will always be glad of this day. I'll tell you what it is, Massachusetts, if this is the New England conscience I hear so much about, I'm precious glad I was born in Tennessee."

"No, you aren't, Old One! you wish you had been born in Maine."

"Well, perhaps I do!" said Tennessee.

THE END.

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